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Collyer

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**THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
ROBERT COLLYER**

VOLUME II

BOOKS BY
JOHN HAYNES HOLMES

**THE REVOLUTIONARY FUNCTION OF
THE MODERN CHURCH**

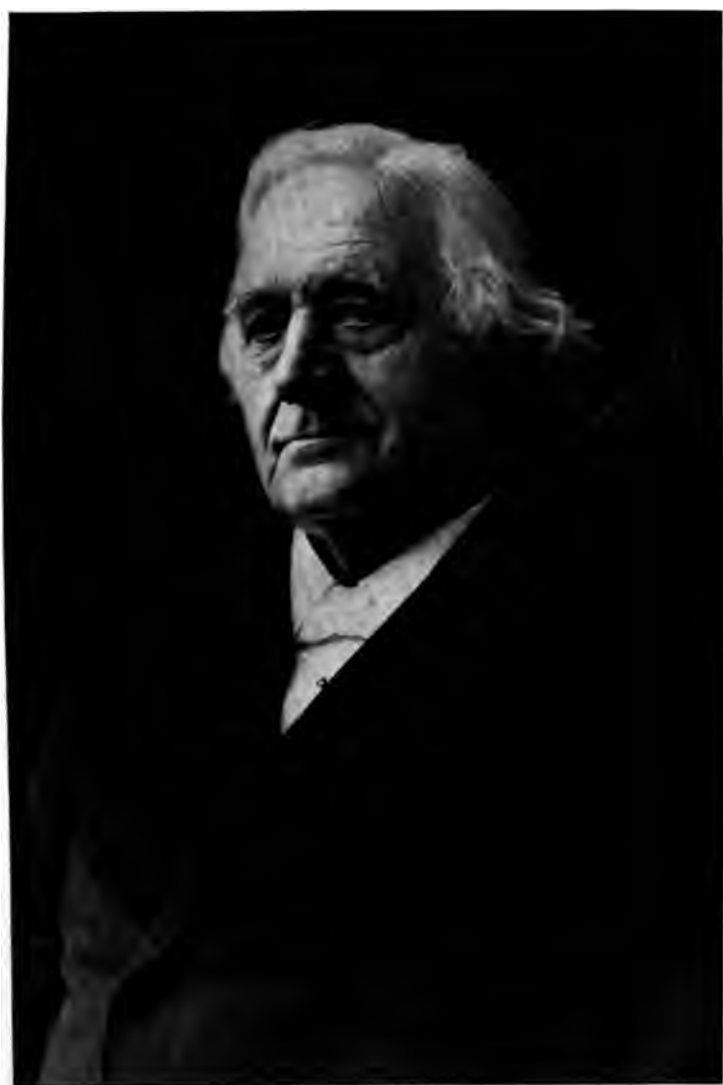
MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

IS DEATH THE END?

NEW WARS FOR OLD

RELIGION FOR TO-DAY

**THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
ROBERT COLLYER (2 volumes)**



ROBERT COLLYER
1903

**THE LIFE AND LETTERS
OF
ROBERT COLLYER
1823-1912**

**BY
JOHN HAYNES HOLMES**

ILLUSTRATED

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME II



**NEW YORK
DODD MEAD AND COMPANY
1917**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME II

CHAPTER	PAGE
IX THE CIVIL WAR—PERSONAL (1861-1865)	1
X THE SUMMER IN EUROPE (1865) . . .	41
XI UNITY CHURCH (1865-1871) . . .	71
XII THE FIRE—AND AFTER (1871-1879) .	148
XIII THE CALL TO NEW YORK (1879) . .	199
XIV THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH (1879- 1896)	230
XV LOOKING TOWARD SUNSET (1896-1912) .	277
XVI SUNSET AND AFTERGLOW (1912) . .	332
XVII WHAT IS THE SECRET?	344
APPENDIX	383
INDEX	387



ILLUSTRATIONS

VOLUME II

Robert Collyer in 1903	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Church of the Messiah	FACING PAGE
As it Appeared at the Time of Dr. Collyer's Call, 1879	198
The Messiah Pulpit	
From a Photograph by Hans Miller, taken on Christmas Sunday, 1912	230
Robert Collyer in 1893	
From a Photograph taken at Rowayton, Conn., by George C. Marvin—A Summer Idyl!	264
Facsimile of Letter Addressed to Mrs. J. T. Fields	296
Robert Collyer and Rev. John Cuckson	
From a Snapshot taken at Plymouth, Mass., in the summer of 1902. A delightfully characteristic pose!	302
Robert Collyer	
From a late Photograph, taken about 1905	332
Memorial in the Church of the Messiah	
Dedicated April 11, 1915	344

**THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
ROBERT COLLYER**



THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF ROBERT COLLYER

CHAPTER IX

THE CIVIL WAR—PERSONAL

1861-1865

"The church, I was glad to find, suffered no loss by the minister's absence at Donelson, Pittsburg Landing and Lawrence. . . . We were as one family in our work and worship, and I was quite content."—R. C. in "Some Memories," pages 152, 160.

THE Civil War was the chief thought and business of Robert Collyer's life during the fateful years from 1861 to 1865. Into the symphony of his days there came crashing this mighty and discordant theme which brooked no interruption, and all else for the time being was overwhelmed. Yet the gentler melodies of his life were only hidden, never lost. Their song is heard bravely, even if sometimes brokenly, in many a letter which came from his pen in these exciting times.

2 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Thus, the thought of Ilkley, like "the tender grace of a day that is dead," is never far beneath the surface of his mind, at least when he is writing Flesher Bland.

"I had a paper from John Dobson yesterday," he writes, "the only one for a long time. . . . He is a good fellow as ever lived. He did me a vast deal of good in my younger days. I do not see the Battys in the lodging-house list. I hope they are not dead yet. Will you please ask William Bland if Richard Hannam is in Addingham yet? I see there is no other church or meeting at Ilkley besides what we knew, only there is a morning service at the chapel. Lately I got a volume of letters from Philadelphia, Plimpton correspondence from three or four centuries ago, 1460-1551. It is curious, and in spots full of interest. There are notices of Addingham, Nessfield, Langbar, Skipton, Bolton Abbey, a letter to the Abbott of Kirkstate, an account of a fight at Otley fair in that far old time, a letter to an old gentleman at Bolton Abbey, and ever so much more."¹

And again—

"Here are the effigies of your old co-worker on the Addingham circuit. What a time it is since I first heard you preach when you were young, and a lot of young admirers came down with you. What a differ-

¹ From letter dated June, 1861.

ent congregation there always was when you came down. I had to laugh at a short notice in a number of the *Ilkley Gazette* that strayed here directly from Ilkley. It was a description of the missionary meeting in the chapel. . . . The writer, after telling about the meeting, said it was not so full as it ought to have been, owing to some *trouble among the trustees*. I said, Well done, Solomon, there is no new thing under the sun. Did you ever know Ilkley chapel when there was not some trouble among the trustees? I had a grand long letter from John Dobson the other day. He is still the same good soul he ever was.”²

Books, as always, constituted a theme of perennial interest. Nothing, not even the cataclysm of the Civil War, could quench this consuming passion. Thus in June, 1861, he writes:

“I have just completed the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a grand work in 21 vols., begun in 1853. Also I have got a fine copy of Milman’s ‘*Latin History*,’ of Bacon’s works, of Burke, Addison, Junius, Virgil, Homer, Demosthenes, and some others. I am reading Motley’s ‘*Dutch Republic*,’ a book you ought to get by all means.”

In the midst of all the excitement and labour of his weeks in Washington, in the service of the Sanitary Commission in the late summer of 1861,

² From letter dated February, 1862.

4 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

he found time to indulge his passion. One adventure stirred his unfailing interest in the local history of Ilkley.

"I had the entree," he writes, "to a splendid library in Washington, in which I found an old book of English Antiquities, containing an account of Ilkley written in the time of Queen Elizabeth, with engravings of old monuments of the Roman occupation, all of which have gone except that copy of an altar that stood down by Beanlands—giving also a tradition of the people, how that altar had aforetime stood down in the water, together with another stone now built into the church steeple and almost defaced."

The somewhat belated discovery of Dickens's "Pickwick Papers" was the occasion of a charming note to Miss Baker, dated "2d washing day after Easter, 1862."

*"Dear Freind:*³

"Allow me to introduce my freind, Mr. Pickwick, a fellow of infinite humour, simplicity and solid goodness. You will not find him intrusive and self-asserting, but modest and retiring, ready to open out and shut up, just as it may please you. You may call him at two in the morning if you want to hear a pleasant jest, and he will be as wide awake and ready as most jesters

³ The correct spelling of this word seems to have been a difficult thing for Dr. Collyer to master.

are after a good dinner, any time of the year. It will not be needful for you to do as the lady did who invited — ⁴ to dinner, and, impatient at his dulness, sent her little daughter, who said, 'Please, sir, mother sends her compliments and will you begin to be funny?' Mr. Pickwick will be always ready, and he will *not need any dinner*.

"Truly,"

It was in 1862 that Collyer was brought in touch for the first time with Jasper Douthit, then a young pioneer preacher in southern Illinois, who was slowly and painfully finding his way into Unitarianism. "My wife," writes Mr. Douthit in his autobiography,⁵ "had often heard Rev. Thomas Wentworth Higginson speak, and she admired him and Theodore Parker, and told me that they were Unitarians. She thought the Unitarians would ordain me to preach, taking none but Christ for Master and Leader in religion. That was what I wanted. Accordingly, I wrote Mr. Higginson. He replied in a very kind letter, and referred me to Robert Collyer, 'a noble man and a minister-at-large in Chicago. I don't know how radical he is, but he is liberal, which is better.' Soon a hearty letter came from Brother Collyer, saying: 'Come and see me, and

⁴ Name illegible.

⁵ "Jasper Douthit's Story."

6 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

go with me to our Western Conference at Detroit, Michigan.'"⁶ Here began a friendship which was closely sustained for just a half-century of time. Collyer was instrumental in getting Jasper Douthit ordained as a Unitarian clergyman at Detroit, and in sending him later to Meadville for study; and always thereafter to the end of his life was "guide, counsellor and friend." In his early letters to Mr. Douthit, books are frequently mentioned, as though Collyer were eager above all things else, as a kind of condition of success for his younger colleague, to have him love the printed word even as he loved it. He writes on February 5, 1862:

"My dear Brother:

"When I was cutting my way clear to Liberality I was glad to take a book whenever one offered. Books and aids to a man in your position do not come under

"The Conference opens on the evening of the 19th June at Detroit. You will need to be here the day before. Come to my house 295 Chicago Avenue and we will go down together. I hope we shall have a good time. Your letter was very good and racy. Keep on preaching and your way will be open. Tell your story simply, bravely and lovingly, and you cannot fail to get sympathy and to do good. I hope that old Brother will let you keep the blossoms another time. They always put a vase of fresh flowers on my pulpit, though they have had to come from the conservatory until now. Ever in true love,

ROBERT COLLYER.

"Chicago, May 23, 1862."

the ordinary canons of giving and receiving. They are rather the calls God makes upon his stewards which they may refuse at their peril. Be sure I shall put the Lord off with as little as possible, just like other men do, so that the volume of essays and any other books I may send you will be rather within than over what a sincere truth seeker like yourself has a right to expect. Will you please let me know of some way to send it along. I get the most of my books from Griggs and Co. of this city who make me a reduction of from 15 to 20 per cent from publishers' prices and I shall be glad to render you any assistance of that sort in my power. Perhaps you would do well to make out a list of such books as you need most and I will send it back priced. I should like to know too, what are the most notable books you have already in your library. But you need not wait until you have read certain books before you begin preaching; *begin now*. Begin as Paul did, right in the focus of your life. Get leave to preach in a school house for nothing and say just what is in your soul. There is no such school-master to bring us to the books we want as preaching, no such college to educate a preacher."

Later he seems to have sent Mr. Douthit more books, as he writes in his letter of May 23, 1862:

"I am glad you got the books. They are not much, but will keep you in profitable reading until we can do better."

8 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Other gifts followed, as witness a letter of uncertain date in 1863 or 1864:

"I have sent you by the Am. Express copies of the *Essays of Carlyle and Macaulay*, with some other little things which you will receive in due time. I wish I could spare more, but I can very well spare these as I have got a new Carlyle and shall get a new Macaulay. I hope you keep well and in good heart, and I trust you will write me as often as you can."

Many of the loveliest aspects of Dr. Collyer's character, as well as interesting features in his career, are revealed in these early letters to Jasper Douthit. They are full of generous interest, wise counsel, and evidence also of substantial help wherever possible. Some scattered extracts will tell the story better than any comment of my own.

"Both your letters came duly to hand. . . . I like your articles. They show a mind of great vigour and a brave, resolute spirit. I feel sure you will be able to make your way. . . . I will write Foreman about you to-morrow. Perhaps he may be able to open a way for you to preach. A man whose heart is full can begin new. . . . Take heart—hold on—and try to begin preaching at Jerusalem where *your* Lord has risen. In true love." ⁷

⁷ March 20, 1863.

"I have been away on vacation—just got home. I am glad to find your letter but sorry to find how very long it has been waiting for me. . . . Try to make a deep mark—gather one, two or three small churches within a circle of a dozen miles that will be able to pay you a hundred dollars each or so, and eke out the rest until better times. I will try to get you some help from our Boston Association, but do not hope to succeed. . . . I wondered at your long silence—I hope you will write more frequently. Do not think it will trouble me. It is a great pleasure to hear from you. Have you had any weddings yet? In true love." ⁸

" . . . Do not get disheartened. The right time is sure to come. You cannot hasten Providence. A Quaker freind (?) of mine says that fortune always works her wheel best when we keep off the crank. I will not let any chance go by that I believe will be the thing for you. . . . Your present work, farm week-days, pulpit Sundays, is to you now what my anvil and pulpit was for 7 to 10 years (I was 3 years uneasy as you are). I do not in the least regret my long bondage. It was a grand inner growth. I hope your health will hold good, that is all I care for. If you keep well, you will sing with Pippa:

'The year's at the spring,
And the day's at the morn,
The lark's on the wing,
The snail's in the thorn,
Morning's at sunrise,
The hillside's dew-pearled,

* September 9, 1862.

ever do mean to sin anyhow. Yet I am in his case, every little while. . . .

About Meadville, I cannot advise you. I left college walls until I went to preach a cement sermon at Meadville last summer. Clarke said to me last October, I am glad of this, because I have always believed that a good preacher without Latin and Greek. I hope, you may too. . . . You are doing well to God you had more help and sympathy. I have all my sympathy and a great deal of my love. I have a line in one of her poems which comes to you nearer than I hope you will ever find. There is a great deal in what an old Indian said to Mott, once, when he heard her speak. 'You have done well if you do not think so.' Here is a letter. 'When I saw his soul—Jasper first, I said.' I suppose the little mite I enclose is all my money. I never without secret service money. I hope your wife understands Carlyle; it proves her to me that I should expect her to be. . . ." ¹⁰

Here is one hundred dollars for you and(?) of mine in Philadelphia. . . . I have

heard from the Indian Society yet, but hope they will also give us at least \$100, which will make three. . . . Try to make connexions wherever you can. Pile in your gospel and trust in the Lord. . . . I am just back from Lawrence, Kansas, and tired to death. So excuse this scrawl.”¹¹

“I want you to come up toward the end of the week, to bring your sweetest and best word along, and to preach for me on Sunday morning, May 20th. I shall preach for the first Parish, and what they give I turn over to you. It will pay your way and something over. Now my man, do not fail me, as I have engaged and shall tell my people they may expect you.”¹²

Vivid also in the correspondence of these years are the revelations of Collyer’s religious thought, and his joyful understanding of the significance of the liberalism which he had so whole-heartedly espoused. It is not hard to guess what good Flesher Bland had been writing about when we read Collyer’s reply in his letter of June, 1861.

“The horns of your dilemma didn’t hurt. They have been blunted by long use. Henri IV of France joined the Catholic Church because the Protestant said the Catholic could go to heaven, but the Catholic said the Protestant could not. So the shrewd king took the double chance. Your idea is somewhat like his, but

¹¹ October 1, 1863.

¹² Undated—probably 1864.

ted, but in much where there could be
I believe that the grace of God which
ation hath appeared unto every man. I be
power of the life of Christ to inspire us i
ge, in a personal and hearty faith in Jesus
tance toward God, that a life of obedience
h in God is everlasting life, and that neg
is everlasting death only to end when the s
s and obeys God purely and heartily out
to his ways. I believe you may get to hear
se you are a good man and holy, but I expect
numbers who hold technically what you hold
will find that most of the teaching of orth
draw and stubble. . . . I am so entirely hap
belief! It has so blessed me and lifted me n
that I hold it ever the most sacred thing I
to be unfolded but with reverent face, still
olded whenever there is need. . . .”

To Jasper Douthit, inquiring about Unitarianism, came this stout reply:¹³

You ask what I mean by our church being the

We never bind a man to this or that form of worship. We never put him under any conference. *He is a free man.* We do not care whether he has ever entered a college or taken a degree. We meet him on the square. But our churches are only another name for our men. The church centres in the man. If he is strong enough to draw it and hold it together we count him in. If he is not he has to slide. I know this is a sad state of affairs but it is just so. If a man is very promising the Unitarian Association will help him along for a year or two, and then he stands on his own merits. Hence, if a man is full of a pure natural power he can take any position in the church that may be open to him, and there are always plenty of vacant churches. He can go on in the most perfect freedom to develop his ideas of faith and worship and he will get the most cordial and loving recognition. There is one thing more: we have hardly any churches like the little mission stations of the Methodist and Presbyterian. Our churches so far as I know without exception are composed of the class of thinkers who are most intelligent and alive—men and women who look outward and inward and can only be satisfied with preaching that touches both worlds. ‘The life that now is’ as well as ‘that which is to come’ is their stand-by. The glory of this earth, of this human life in men and women and little children, the presence of God *here* in these times as surely as in old times and so much the more that the world is more than it was then. I believe you will see now what I mean. It is a glorious position when

14 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

a man can take it. I hope you will begin at once to break your way. Depend upon it, you will succeed if you are steady and true to the call that is now sounding in your nature, and have in you the man for this great trust.

"In true love,

"ROBERT COLLYER."

Again, to the same correspondent:¹⁴

"Our liberal pulpits are the most difficult in the world to fill, because there is nothing in the books to aid you materially. A man to do well must (1) have a broad sight of books in general—(2) a broad sympathy with life—(3) a touch of the poetic faculty and inspiration into which he can dip when he cannot command experience—(4) a faculty for keeping the most critical sermon hearers in the world interested and instructed."

Two last letters, brimfull of personality, one in a few lines running the gamut of pathos and humour, the other giving delightful glimpses of thought and life, must be added to our list. Both are addressed to his friend, Miss Baker, a teacher in whose school Collyer's eldest daughter, Emma, was a student, and run as follows:¹⁵

¹⁴ December 15, 1862.

¹⁵ Undated.

"Dear Friend:

"The eulogy on Winthrop and the Harvard boys was written while my heart and eyes were full of tears, their memories came up before my spirit in such a tender and noble light. The narrative is on its travels around the Parish to the various sick, etc., who could not be at church. When it comes back you shall have it to copy for yourself what you want. I would write a copy from memory but it would not be literal and I am superstitious about paragraphs that affect myself much in the writing. I have a feeling they are sort of inspiration.

"I think you had better not put more than half steam on Emma in arithmetic; she can never do anything but worry over it. I never could, and I had rather she would count 6 and 4 are 8 until she die than suffer what I did over those horrible pert conclusive axioms. I feel as the man did when some one said, Mr. dear sir, facts are against you, 'damn facts.'

"Ever truly,

"R. C."

"Ash Wensda'.

"O that it were Cash Wensda'."

". . . Emma, Hattie, Annie and Robert Staples are all well and growing upward. Sam is as tall as I am. Mother looks younger, I look older. Yesterday I preached on the way to come to a conviction of the immortal life (1) by considering its necessity, (2) by observing all the hints of it in those that are already on its borders, last words, looks, etc., and (3) by giv-

16 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ing not a critical and timid consideration but a warm and generous welcome to *all* the revelations that have been and are made of it, especially to that revelation in Jesus Christ that revolutionised the world. The best lecture in the course I gave was the one on Hawthorne. Mrs. B. said it was inspired. Mrs. B., you remember, used to be very bitter in her opposition to me. Mrs. H. has taken a pew in the Methodist Church. *Laus Deo.* . . . Send me some pictures or drawings or leaves for our Fair, please. And oh, do come back to Chicago 'for I long to see you that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift by the mutual faith both of you and me.' In true love, yours,"

In the life of Unity Church, as in the life of its minister, the Civil War held the dominant position through all these years. In the beginning, it must have appeared alike to pastor and people, supremely interested in their parochial undertaking, as an unmitigated calamity. In the long run, however, it proved to be something very like a blessing. For it was this event, as we have seen, which gave Robert Collyer, as nothing else could have done, his opportunity for fame and power. Within a few short months, he was known to every man and woman in Chicago. Admiration for his character and talents became as unanimous as dependence upon his services. Every day of the war added to his authority as a public

leader, and widened beyond the limits of his own parish and city, his personal influence and reputation. Inaccurate in fact, exaggerated in sentiment, fulsome in expression, and yet substantially true in spirit, was the tribute paid to him by an admiring friend shortly after the war, in an article in *Fraser's Magazine* entitled "A Story of a Yorkshire Blacksmith." "It would be impossible," says the writer, "to relate here a tithe of the Herculean services performed by him. His devotion to the soldiers of the Union—his tenderness to all sufferers, whether Federals or Confederates—were such as have consecrated his name in every part of the country. Hundreds breathed their last in his arms, and confided to him their last messages of love, and many are they who owe their lives to his sleepless care. When the conflict was over, and the dead of Chicago had been brought back and were laid in their graves, the discourses of Robert Collyer were their epics and their requiems. On the anniversary which the nation had with one consent adopted, on which the people went forth to lay flowers upon the graves of their fallen defenders, all voices in Chicago called for the man who had followed the armies so faithfully, to deliver the address. . . . Every year it is the demand of

1

18 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

each city east and west that he shall visit and speak to them; and he at present stands without equal as a preacher in his hold upon the mind and heart of the American people."¹⁶

Now the public eminence here reflected, begun in the early days of the Civil War, and well under way before the conflict was ended, inevitably redounded to the great happiness and prosperity of the church which Robert Collyer served. His popularity and influence were Unity's as well—it would have been impossible, even had it been desired, to separate the two. The result is seen in repeated references in Dr. Collyer's letters during the latter part of this period, to crowded pews and plans for great developments in the future. "The church is full—very," he writes Miss Alice Baker on November 8, 1864. To Edward Everett Hale, he says on February 12, of the next year:

"We are full—have no pews left, and propose to build afresh—want a church twice as large, and hope we may get it—have a committee out to see after subscriptions which bids fair to do something handsome."

¹⁶ "The writer of the article in Fraser is a Mr. Conway, not a very reliable man when his heart is in the thing he says, as it happened to be in speaking of me. We are old and dear friends, so you must take his words with several grains of allowance for that."
—R. C. to Flesher Bland, April 11, 1866.

Again to Miss Baker he writes in an undated letter penned shortly after the assassination of Lincoln:

"... the church stays full. . . . There is discussion going on whether we shall enlarge our place or build a new one. We must do one or the other. I think it will end in this being enlarged this summer while I go to England to see my 'auld mither.'"

And a final blast of good cheer comes on his return from the foreign excursion described in the next chapter:

"Home again!" he cries. "I have to be glad in little Unity being so full that there isn't a seat to be had. It is full as a tick. Some of 'em had to stand to hear the sermon on Theatres, besides having all the chairs we could skeer up in the aisles. . . . Next summer we are to build if the times will at all admit it. If we had room we might add forty families to our fold this winter. I have invented a very pretty antithesis for the benefit of the Unities. It is that they must either get a bigger church or—a smaller preacher! They say they will not entertain the one side of it at all, and have secured the big lot on the other corner for the purpose of building such a church as they want."

Still more eloquent testimony to the prestige which Collyer so rapidly accumulated during the war, is found in the "calls" which came to

20 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

him from churches in the East. Most notable was that of the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society in Boston, Theodore Parker's great Music Hall congregation. Through years of the ablest and bravest preaching that has ever been known in this country, Parker had built up the largest Protestant audience in America, "save that which orthodox Mr. Beecher, who breaks with no theologic tradition of the New England Church, inspire(d) with his deep emotional nature . . . and charm(ed) with his poetic eloquence."¹⁷ On January 2, 1859, Theodore Parker spoke in the Music Hall pulpit the last sermon which he was ever fated to deliver. At four o'clock on the following Sunday morning he suffered a hemorrhage from the lungs, which prevented his entering his pulpit, and which later revealed conditions so serious that, on the advice of his physicians, he gave up all public duties, and on February 3, sailed for the West Indies. This journey in search of health was later extended to Europe, and ended with the death of the great preacher on May 10, 1860, in Florence, Italy.

During Parker's absence, and after his passing, the pulpit of the Music Hall was "supplied" by some of the more independent Unitarian

¹⁷ See Theodore Parker's "Experience as a Minister," page 175.

clergymen, such as Samuel J. May, James Freeman Clarke, and John Weiss, and by such distinguished laymen as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, and George William Curtis. But the need of a regular minister, a true successor in pulpit and parish to Theodore Parker, was deeply felt; and at last, on December 1, 1862, resulted in the following letter to

"Rev. Robert Collyer:

"Very dear sir:

"The undersigned, a Committee appointed by the Parish of the twenty-eighth Congregational Society of this city, to correspond with you, most cheerfully comply with the request made of them.

"It is well known to you that since the serious illness in January, 1859 (resulting subsequently in the death) of our late Pastor, Rev. Theodore Parker—now nearly four years—this Society has had no regular or accredited minister. With a large attendance upon the ministrations which could be offered by casual clerical and lay assistance, the Society has patiently awaited the presence of some individual who seemed calculated to unite a decisive majority in his favour for permanent connection. During this long period, with a constancy wholly unanticipated, the Society has held regular services on Sunday; and the bond of union among our people is to a remarkable degree unbroken. Though without a settled clergyman, and deprived of many

22 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

spiritual and social advantages which such possession would give, we feel that the Society has discharged a large and valued function in maintaining the independence and catholicity of the pulpit of Music Hall. But there are needs of our people which we feel we cannot longer neglect. Time, in this busy harvest-season of Death, not infrequently makes incursions into our fold; we have none to whom we can rightfully appeal, as the leader of our flock, to administer consolation to the bereaved, or perform the last solemn rites for the dead. The season of Joy, in the alternations of Life's experiences, comes to the households of many; there is none, who should have a deep interest in our social and parochial welfare, to be summoned to share the pleasures of the hour. The interests of progressive, liberal, rational Christianity, in this agitating, thoughtful, healthful period of the Nation's career, are imperilled by the want, at this special focus-point of influence, of an earnest-soul to preach the needed word and adorn the living practice. We cannot be unmindful of the trusts committed to us, as an organised moral agency, in this era of the World's history.

"With these considerations pressing upon us, we are not forgetful that you and we are, comparatively, strangers to each other. What we have heard and know of *you* is most favourable. We trust the impressions you have received of us are equally so. Still, we desire further and more intimate acquaintance with you. Many of our people have not had the pleasure of hearing you. We are therefore empowered to tender to you

an invitation to speak four or five weeks with us, as may suit your own convenience and engagements, during which you shall, on Sunday, preach to us, and during the intervening period, meet with our congregation personally, and learn fully of our feelings and desires upon the great issues which underlie—both for Time and Eternity—so important a relation as that of Minister and People.

“To this our cordial invitation we ask a favourable consideration, as we know we shall receive a frank and honest response. Some who now address you were of the little band that invited our first minister to his beloved work. What was then begun in faith, though of small account, has, through the favour of a kind Providence, become a mighty instrumentality for individual benefit and the nation’s welfare. We desire to enlarge and perpetuate it. Without a leader and teacher, the work may languish or fail. We feel that we cannot longer encounter the risk of so unfortunate and disastrous a result!

“We remain, in behalf of the twenty-eighth Congregational Society of Boston, your fellow-workers for all good.

“JOHN FLINT

JOHN R. MANLEY

A. A. BURRAGE

CHARLES K. WHIPPLE

EDNAH D. CHENEY

CHRISTINA D. DUDLEY

CHARLES W. SLACK.”

To this communication, Collyer replied on December 8, as follows:

24 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

"Charles W. Slack:

"My dear friend:

"The letter from the Committee of which you are a member, asking me to come down and preach four or five Sundays to the 28th Congregational Society in Boston, with a view to a closer mutual acquaintance, and, if all sides are suited, an ultimate settlement, has duly come to hand. I write now only to advise you of the fact, and to thank you for the sweet true manliness of the letter itself. It sounds as holy as when a man—a true man—asks a true woman for a nearer acquaintance that may result in their being made one for life (and *not* that one the man). The grave possibilities that are foreshadowed to me, if I come down, make any hasty decision impossible. Please, therefore, allow me two weeks for a good think, at the end of which time I will say 'Ay' or 'No.' Under ordinary circumstances, I know you might expect me to say 'Ay' or 'No' now. But the relation between Unity Church and its Pastor has always been so loving and tender, we are at this time so entirely united and prosperous, that I dare not even seem to give place to a new element that may result in a separation until I have made up my mind whether I can possibly leave them in the event of being called to Music Hall.

"In true love,

"ROBERT COLLYER.

"To C. W. Slack, John Flint, and others:

"Chicago, Dec. 8th, 1862.

"(My birthday)"

That Collyer was pleased, as well as perplexed, by this invitation, goes without saying. No greater honour could have been conferred upon him. To be asked to succeed Theodore Parker was to be asked to stand in one of the two or three world-famous pulpits of the country, to inherit a task of public service unexcelled for courage, vision and true power, and to lead a congregation pre-eminent for intellectual vitality and numbering many of the most conspicuous figures in the world of radical thought and fundamental social reform. This was a call to be coveted by the greatest in the land, and here was it presented to a man who had entered the pulpit only three years before with "hands so horny from the anvil that (he) used to pare them." What wonder that he was tempted! And yet from the beginning of his consideration of the problem, he seems to have clung to Unity as a mother to her child. Before his final reply, he wrote:¹⁸

"I am just now in a perplexity. I have an invitation from the 28th Society in Boston (Mr. Parker's) inviting me to preach for them with a view to a settlement. They want me to be their stand-by at Music Hall. Of course it is a very grand offer, but I live here in the midst of the truest love and sympathy, and

¹⁸ To Jasper Douthitt, December 15, 1862.

26 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

a good success, and am entirely unwilling to change for any position. . . .”

After his reply, declining the offer, had gone forward, he wrote to Miss Baker:

“I look back and fetch a great breath and feel as if I had got a thing to be proud of (as when I used to make a nice horse shoe). On the side of interest, etc. I *was* tempted; on the side of my love—not a tempt, as the Lord liveth. I am as happy as a clam. I think you all over-rate me, but I do mean to be a most humble, faithful minister and Pastor a good deal better than I have been. . . .”

The reply is dated December 22, 1862, and is as follows:

“On the receipt of your letter, received two weeks ago, to-day, inviting me to preach with a view to settlement, I wrote at once to one of the members of your body to say that the matter was so serious as to compel me to ask for two weeks to consider it. The time expires to-day, and I shall now answer.

“I can remember but one other decision in my life that has cost me so much painful searching thought, and that was when I went out from my home and kindred, to seek a home in this new world.

“My answer after this most painful and I believe, sacred searching is—I cannot come. Perhaps it is not

needful that I should say more than this: and that the matter should rest just where it is. If your letter had felt like the cold formal thing that is usually sent on such errands, I *should* say no more; but there is so much in it to touch my best nature, as well as in others that have come to me touching the same thing, that I cannot but ask you to listen while I tell you what is in my head and heart to compel this answer.

"I can make my case clearer by stating it under its different and natural heads—1st. Love.

"My church in this place has grown up with me. Your letter has revealed to me, as I never knew before, how it has grown down into my heart. A very small company of men and women gathered round me at the start, 3½ years ago. I was just out of the blacksmith shop. They held on to me; built me a church; defended me; loved me; bore with me. They have taken the most untiring interest in all I have done, given me more than I have ever asked for, done more work and given more money for benevolent purposes than I ever dared to hope for. My sermons (poor as I believe them to be) they have listened to with a fresh unflagging interest, never under any circumstances dropping asleep. I have rejoiced with those that did rejoice, and wept with them that wept; every house in my Parish is a sort of home to me. I know its history for three years as much as a man ought to know. The manifestations of their love to me since I mentioned your letter have been so deep, so unbearable if I had resolved to leave them (and it would tear

28 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

the most delicate fibres of my own heart so much to leave them under these circumstances) that I have no choice of answers, I must say *No*.

"2d. Duty.—The small obscure venture has already assumed a most hopeful promise. Cooped up, out North, in some such way as Mr. Parker was at Roxbury, our church is almost full, and the congregation gathers from all parts of the City, some coming steadily on foot five miles. Most of those are fresh ardent young men, the future power of the North-West. The testimony that I have had from all quarters of the good I have done to those young men, and to all, is beyond all that I ever imagined possible. Our City is growing rapidly; our Church grows with it. If there is any public event into which ministers come as a natural element I am one of those selected. Our pulpit is known as the vanguard of liberal Christianity in the North-West. It will be vastly more so if I stay and prosper. If I leave, *this* church will go to pieces, or suffer fearfully. Our removal to a more central place, and the creation of a 'Music Hall' here if I stay, our friends consider a foregone conclusion. I am already 3½ years deep in the life of this city; have done all sorts of things in it. This would all be lost if I left my post. Men of our faith who can make much of a mark are very few; and for *duty*, I see I must say, No.

"3d. Fear. Theodore Parker was the greatest preacher, and one of the greatest men, of his age. His very shadow on the platform of Music Hall is a fearful thing. I believe if I came to Boston, you would do

all for me you ever did for him; love me, support me, defend me. I have not one touch of fear on that side at all. But there is another element you cannot control. The pulpit at Music Hall is the 'dissidence of dissent' East. It *must* give and take the hardest blows. To settle down into a nice, easy-going company of 'good workers,' would, in my estimation, be a 'most lame and impotent conclusion.'

"I know very well that this is the result whenever a new idea has won recognition and respect. It will be so sometime with what I am sorry to see is getting to be called Parkerism. Friends have written to me since the rumour of your most generous intention went over the invisible wires. 'You will be able to unite the 28th Soc'y with the great Unitarian body.' Dear friends, believe me that is what I never want to see. There *must be* a turbulent, irrepressible Christ in Boston. You have in your former minister held that great trust; if you let it go God will raise up another. The man who shall next take up the sword Parker wielded must be muscular as Parker. I hope I shall still grow stronger and better able to do my share of whatever hard work is going; but a most faithful searching of my nature, has revealed to me far more closely than I saw, before I needed to search so closely for your sakes, that the sword in my hand would be the weapon of a giant in the hands of a child. I came down to preach for you, because I loved your great, true Preacher who has gone to Heaven; and because I loved your faithful fulfilment of his spirit and purpose.

80 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

"There is no place on this continent where I would rather stand, except where I *do* stand. If I knew of a truth that I could be to you what he was, whose memory you love so dearly, and whose mantle you wear, it would be still harder than it is to say no, even now; but I have no other answer possible. My love to those that hold me, my duty to the great young city and country where my life so far is recognised as a power for good, and my deep sense of my utter unfitness to fill the place where your love would exalt me, leave me no alternative. With true love, I remain

"ever, ROBERT COLLYER."

At a special meeting of the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society, held in Sons of Temperance Hall on the evening of Friday, January 9, 1863, the result of this correspondence was reported by Mr. C. W. Slack, and the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

"Resolved, that the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society have received with mingled feelings of regret and pleasure the heart-felt and conclusive letter of declination of the Rev. Robert Collyer to the invitation to visit and preach to this parish; that while they unfeignedly regret that his services are not to be gained to this Society and City, they are nevertheless pleased that the great Northwest, as well as the Common Country, together with the interests of progressive, rational Christianity, are still to have the benefits of his ear-

nest and disinterested labours; and that their cordial wishes for his continued health and prosperity are herewith tendered with fraternal respect and love."

The closing of these negotiations would seem to have been definite and final. Nevertheless, within a few months we learn from casual references in Dr. Collyer's correspondence that the Theodore Parker Society was again approaching him,¹⁹ and on the books of the Twenty-Eighth we find the record of December 8, 1863, stating that "it was unanimously voted 'that an invitation be extended to Rev. Rt. Collyer to become Pastor of this Society.' On motion of Mr. C. W. Slack it was voted that a Committee of seven be appointed to prepare a call, and correspond with Mr. Collyer in reference thereto."

The reopening of negotiations apparently renewed and strengthened the temptation offered by the first summons to Boston. Something seems to have radically altered Collyer's mind. The records of the Parker congregation show that Mr. Slack had received two private letters from the minister of Unity offering distinct encouragement to the proposal that he be called a second time. Collyer writes Dr. Hale on Feb-

¹⁹ "The call about which I sent you a paragraph was to Theodore Parker's society. I declined it. They are still after me, but I love Chicago."—R. C. to Flesher Bland, June 24, 1863.

32 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ruary 23, 1864, that he has been "very strongly drawn to the 28th Society at the close of last year and but for hindrances that seemed almost more than natural, believe I should have resigned here and come down." What it was that thus moved him to the reconsideration of this change is not clear. But whatever it was, the period of acquiescence soon passed, to be succeeded by a short period of sad confusion, and then at last by a second refusal. "The prospect now," runs the Hale letter above quoted, "is not very encouraging that I shall accept the most earnest and loving call of that good, brave church. . . . My way is hedged about. I see not yet what I shall do. I would fain stand in my lot to the end of my days."

On March 30, 1864, went forward the final letter to the Theodore Parker congregation:

"To the Committee of the 28th Congregational Society, Boston.

"Dear Freinds:

"I have waited beyond all common usage before answering the letter you sent me in December last, inviting me again to become the pastor of your Society. For a good while in the sure hope that I should be able to say I would come, and latterly (as that hope died out), because I shrank from the pain which a refusal would give my own spirit.

"At the close of the year I was so strongly drawn to you, both in judgment and sympathy, that I was on the verge of resigning my charge in Unity Church, with the expectation of entering, on the first of May, on the duties to which you had so earnestly called me. I was prevented from doing this, however, by circumstances which I mentioned to Mr. Slack on my visit to Boston, two months ago. It was impossible that I should leave this church then. Since then, those things have gradually blended into others that still fence me away from you, and must now dictate the 'No,' that, for my own sake, it gives me extreme pain to write.

"These other things, altogether, I cannot mention; but I can mention the two most notable. The first is the woeful heart-sinking I feel in spite of your kind and strong assurances—that *you* know, as well as I do, the difference between myself and Mr. Parker. Whenever I sit down and measure myself for an hour by his life, letters, and sermons, dear friends believe me, you *do not* know how far I am below the mark of the man who must stand in Mr. Parker's place, if any man ever shall stand there! I *do* know it, far more clearly since I have read his 'Life,' than I did before; it has taken the presumption clean out of me. I say over to myself, how you have told me I am not to *succeed* your former Pastor, but to stand for myself. I wish I could make myself believe it, but I cannot. The pastor of the 28th Society must be Mr. Parker's successor. If he is worthy of the place, he may well be more proud and glad of that succession than he would to succeed

84 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

any man who has lived in this age. *I am not* worthy. I assume no false humility. I think I have fought fairly for the place I occupy; but, shut in as I was to the life of a white slave in the English factories, from 1830 to 1838, and from 1838 to 1859 compelled to work hard at some manual labour every day for my daily bread, with no such opportunity for books (until I came into this country) as the children of this good land have all their life long, it is no shame for me to say that I am compelled to rely for whatever I do on other things than those any man must have who will worthily be your pastor.

"The second thing I can mention is that when the dearest freind ²⁰ I ever had lay a-dying, in Brooklyn, he begged me, almost with his latest breath, if I could bring my mind to give up Unity Church, to take the work there he was compelled to lay down. I am not able to say, however, that I *can* leave this dear people, and the work I have on my hands in Chicago. It is no great thing, but it is woven round and round my life.

"I trust you will understand and feel for me; that you will find the man you need, and that I am not, to aid you in your great good work; and that always you will believe me

"Your sincere freind and servant in God,

"ROBERT COLLYER.

"C. K. Whipple, Charles W. Slack, and others, Committee of the 28th Congregational Society of Boston."

* "(Rev. Nahor Augustus Staples.)" This line added in pencil in another hand.

The two decisions not to go to Music Hall were as wise as they were brave. I know of no episodes in Dr. Collyer's career which testify more impressively to the shrewd, hard, native common-sense which gave substance and shape to the sentiment within him, and the latent courage which at sundry times and places in his life withstood like granite the sweeping tides of fortune. Here were at work in the field of practical discussion those same faculties of reason and will which had played so large a part in his deliberate progress from Methodism to Unitarianism. It was of course at bottom the exceeding love which he had for his people at Unity which held him to his post. But in the case of any man less well poised and self-mastered, even these bonds of affectionate devotion would have snapped beneath the strain of the mighty "pull" from Boston. With rare vision and sound understanding, Collyer saw things as he looked before, very much as we now see them as we look back. What a pity it would have been, for example, had this man left Unity at the very moment when he was entering sure-footed and confident upon the climbing paths of fame, and thus cut short that story, the later chapters of which constitute some of the proudest pages in the history of Chicago! Just to think of this

86 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

great city of the Middle West, in the days of its marvellous growth on the one hand and of its stupendous tragedy on the other, without the figure of Robert Collyer at the summit of its life, is to see it shorn of one of its crowning beauties and most glorious distinctions. He followed a true instinct of prophecy when he held fast to Unity as to his own soul, and knit himself into its life, and therewith into the life of the community as a central strand in the growing pattern. And then, on the other hand, who of us to-day can view with equanimity the prospect of Robert Collyer as the successor to Theodore Parker? Collyer was a genius in his own right. It is impossible to think of him as being withered by "the fierce light that beat from Parker's fame," as were even such rarely-gifted preachers as David A. Wasson and James Vila Blake.²¹ But his talents, like those of Parker, were his own, and would have adapted themselves with difficulty either to Music Hall or to the very different environment of Boston. In all probability Collyer could not have held the great audience gathered and sustained through the stormy decade of the '50s by the masterful power of "the modern Elijah"; and the remnants of this congregation would have served as poor founda-

²¹ See J. W. Chadwick's "Theodore Parker," page 385.

tion material for a society of his own. More than once in his early days Collyer referred in a sort of mystic way to a guidance of "Divine Providence" in the critical moments of his life. I find no such reference in connection with this episode—his very deliberate estimate of the Boston problem and his quickened affection for his people were perhaps too much in the forefront of his consciousness. But that the guidance at this time was as if divine, is obvious.

Another "call," which offered a very different problem, was one which reached him in the spring of 1864 from the Second Unitarian Society in Brooklyn. The appeal here was strictly personal, and came not from the church, but from its late minister, his beloved friend, Nahor A. Staples, who, as Collyer narrates in his last letter to the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society, had died with the request upon his lips that his Chicago comrade, if possible, surrender Unity and take up the work in Brooklyn. "He whose voice went deeper into my heart than that of any other man," he wrote to Dr. Hale, "pleaded very tenderly with me before he was taken away that, if I did change, it should be to (his) Parish." This invitation, sent by the people in faithful obedience to their dying pastor's suggestion, touched Collyer deeply, and for a time he seemed

38 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

undecided, so strong was the call of friendly love. Writing to Mr. Douthit on March 14, 1864, he said:

"You will see by the *Journal* that I am called to Brooklyn. Whether I shall go or not I do not yet know. The folks down there are very kind. Make every sort of handsome offer that a fellow can want to have made, but the Parish here is very deep down in my heart, and I doubt whether, if I want to, I can get it out enough to leave it. What vast and unspeakable loss we have sustained in the death of Staples and King."

The final answer was inevitable, although it was long delayed for the very pain it gave him to say he could not come. The change suggested, however, was impossible; and in the last analysis the incident had probably no effect upon the current of Collyer's life beyond that of fixing for good and all the determination not to leave Chicago at this time. The letter of declination, dated April 26, 1864, was as follows:


"Brethren and dear Friends:

"I have held your good and generous invitation to be pastor of your parish unanswered very much longer than I ought to have done, because of the great struggle that rose in my heart and would not be stilled, be-

tween the love and duty which holds me here and that which drew me to you. Resolving at last to hold fast one or the other, I have found that I must stand here where I began to preach our great gospel, though drawn by many and most sacred things to you, and so I have told my people that I shall not leave them. I believe, dear friends, that in doing this I simply do my duty, as well as stand true to the deepest instinct of my nature. If there were no such tie as binds me to this place and people, there is no place in the world I should prefer to New Chapel, no people I would so gladly live with and serve as those you represent. If in any way I can serve you short of this, I will most gladly do so. Your Chapel is very sacred to me as the place in which was given out the richest life of my good and dear friend now gone up to God. For his sake, as for your own, I shall ever hold you dear, and while labouring here with no divided heart, shall find, I trust, that my heart is so enlarged through his influence and yours, that I can well love you also, and long and pray for your welfare.

“Truly your Brother”

Robert Collyer ended this period of the Civil War, as we have seen, full launched upon his career of fame and public usefulness. The days of humble obscurity were forever gone. Furthermore, the field of his activity was definitely, and, so far as could be at all foreseen, permanently fixed. Having resisted two calls from the



40 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

East, one the highest honour, and the other the strongest personal appeal, that could be offered, he was now settled, beyond all further questioning, for a prolonged period of service as pastor of Unity Church. There would seem to have been nothing with which the world at this moment could tempt him, and nothing which he himself could covet. He had found his own, and now was to set himself without interruption or diversion to the prodigious task of making this his best.

CHAPTER X

THE SUMMER IN EUROPE

1865

"In the six years of our life in Chicago I had dreamed that some time in the future I might be able to cross the ocean to the old homeland. . . . And lo! here I was bidden to go forthwith. . . . So I went . . . and all the way over on the steamer, I dreamed dreams and saw visions."—R. C. in "Some Memories," page 169.

THE close of the war found Robert Collyer worn and tired. His labours through all the six years of his Chicago life had been tremendous, and once at least, on the return from the trying days at Donelson, had been broken by illness.¹ He was offered the customary ministerial vacations, to be sure, in the summer seasons, and accepted them without apology. "Blessed be that indifference to sermons and services," he wrote, "which can afford to give the pastor a good va-

¹"Since then (visit to Donelson) I have been sick, and unable to attend to much business."—R. C. in letter to Jasper Douthit, March 20, 1862.

42 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

cation once every year, and just at that time when thinking and writing and preaching exhaust him more in four weeks than four months would exhaust him in cool, bracing weather." More than once, also, he journeyed afield on occasions other than those devoted to the work of the Sanitary Commission. Thus in the summer of 1860, he went to Portland, Worcester, Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Niagara. "Dined with our dear friend, Dr. Furness," he writes, "and called as many of my old friends as I could get into the woods at my old home, and had a grand meeting." In June, 1862, he preached the Commencement sermon at the Meadville Theological School. In the fall of this same year, as we have seen, he went to Boston to preach and lecture. In a letter to Flesher Bland, dated June 24, 1863, he writes, "I have been absent a month, doing things—addressing the Unitarian Association in Boston, attending our Western Conference, visiting New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and I know not what beside." In February, 1864, he hurried to Brooklyn to sit by the death-bed of his beloved friend, Nahor A. Staples,² minister of the Second

² "He was dear to me as Jonathan was to David."—R. C. in "Some Memories," page 165. Dr. Collyer's lovely tribute to Staples in this autobiography should not be missed.

Church, accompanied his ashes to Mendon, Massachusetts, and on the following Sunday preached a memorial sermon to the bereaved congregation. In July, 1864, he was in Meadville again to address the faculty and students of the Theological School on "The Western Mission and Missionary." But the summer vacation periods were not over-long, the journeys to Boston and elsewhere were not over-easy, his church work was heavy, the obligations of public service and public speech were severe in the extreme, and the thought of the war was always in his mind and its passion on his heart. Little wonder that, as the spring of 1865 waned into summer, a condition of physical fatigue and nervous disorganisation began slowly but surely to reveal itself. The sermons no longer came easily. The preacher had to fight for them; and when at last they arrived, they were of poor quality. "Some of them were so poor and fatuous," he says, "that they made me sick, and I burnt them off-hand." The labours of the parish were no longer handled quickly and with good cheer, but fretfully, tardily, and with immense exertion. Every job, so to speak, was a *tired* job. It is doubtful if Collyer really knew what was the matter. He was too much occupied with his work, and still too much interested in it, to be

44 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

able or willing to give himself over to the task of self-examination. But the people knew! And therefore, on a certain Saturday evening, did one of the officers come to the minister's study and say: "We want you to take a rest this summer, to go over to your old home and see the folks; and here is a check for your expenses." The money thus given, and afterwards before he started, says the Doctor in his autobiography, "would have been equal to three years' steady work at the anvil!"

No proposal could have been more welcome to the minister of Unity than this of a vacation journey to England. The idea of an escape from the labours of the parish for a period of three months and a distance of four thousand miles was in itself a glorious prospect to Collyer's tired and laden mind. But better than this was the idea of going to the homeland and looking once again upon the well-remembered scenes and faces of his early years in Yorkshire. No immigrant from across the seas had ever become more thoroughly assimilated to American thought and life than Robert Collyer. No peaceful invader had ever taken this new country more quickly or nearly to his heart. In the meadow-lands of Pennsylvania, where were sent down firm and far the roots of his new life, he had found such

opportunity for growth and blossoming as old England could never have given him. And in the streets and homes of the sprawling lake-city of the Middle West, he had met and used such material for fortune as simply did not exist in the countries of the ancient world. What wonder that, from the very beginning, he drank in the atmosphere of American thoughts and ways as a transplanted flower drinks in the air of some new habitat! What wonder that, to the smiling farms about Shoemakertown, where he had reared the roof-tree of his new home and seen his children play, and to the busy highways of Chicago over which he had marched to fame and influence, he was giving a loyalty and affection which now had first place within his heart! And what wonder also that, when his adopted country trembled and cracked beneath the strain of civil conflict, he leaped to her aid, and pledged his all to her salvation! From the very moment that he placed foot upon the Battery in New York, Robert Collyer was an American; and to the end of his days, this nation had first claim upon his life.

And yet was England ever in his thought. Nothing indeed in all of Dr. Collyer's career is more touching and beautiful than his abiding affection for the country which had given him

46 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

birth and for the people whose blood was running in his veins. How he loved to recall his boyhood days—the white-washed cottage in the Washburndale, the blacksmith shop in Ilkley, the rolling moors aglow with heather and echoing to the call of lark and cuckoo! How gladly he conjured up in imagination the actors on this romantic stage—the silent father, the tireless mother, Hardy the schoolmaster, Birch the smith, John Dobson the book-taster, and the rest of a goodly company! And how, in lecture, sermon or anecdote, he irradiated these memories of places and persons with the magic glow of tenderness, till even the old factory with its clanging bell took on the charm of poetry and song! Never at any time did Collyer allow his friends in private or public to forget the story of his origin. To him it brought too many riches of joy and sorrow and lovely human interest to be lightly put aside; and these riches, the treasure of his heart, partly in pride and partly in sheer joy of sharing the best he had, he poured out upon the world. During many years of his life, these took the form of reminiscences, tenderly and humorously told, of a life long past and definitely ended. At one time they found expression in a curious antiquarian interest which carried him back to “works and days” embalmed

in mouldering monuments, dusty parish records, old-time chronicles, and led him at last to the laborious preparation, in collaboration with J. Horsfall Turner, of a large volume entitled "Ilkley: Ancient and Modern."³ In early years, however, these things appeared as vital parts of an experience still going on, or even as half homesick cries of a heart which missed the old in not having yet found and laid hold upon the new. The early letters to Flesher Bland, as we have seen, abound with fond references to the English midlands from which they both had come; and no one of them was complete without a bit of gossip about this or that acquaintance of the older time. The early sermons are redolent of English manners as these had revealed themselves to the child of dale and upland. It is not hard to believe, as we read these contemporary documents, that Dr. Collyer was speaking not merely poetry but history, when he declared in his address before the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in 1871, "There is not a day when I stand on the lakeshore that I do not see the moors that were lifted up about my old habitation, and a little stone cottage nestling in among the greenery, and the glancing waters, and the lift of the lark, with his song, up into

³ Published in Leeds in 1885.

48 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

heaven until you cannot see him, and a hundred things beside that belong to this blessed place of my birth and breeding."

That Collyer longed more than once, after his arrival in this country, to return to England and visit beloved scenes, is indubitable. This desire took no certain or plausible shape, however, until after his coming to Chicago, when for the first time he rose high above the margin line of poverty. In his March 28, 1860, letter to Flesher Bland, he speaks of his "hope to go home in '62."⁴ In a letter to the same correspondent, written as late as June, 1861, he speaks of this hope in such a way as to indicate that plans for the trip were definitely made. "What a queer feel it is," he says, referring to local news from Ilkley, "to see names one remembers as children advertised as housekeepers on their own hook. I shall come back sad I know, and with a new sense of life next summer, but if the war does not prevent me, I shall be sure to go." The war, however, did this very thing. Within a few weeks of this letter, Collyer had heard from Dr. Bellows about work on the Sanitary Commission, and from that time until Appomattox, he was too busy and too much absorbed in the great conflict to give any thought to adventures across the sea.

⁴ See above, Vol. I, page 226.

Now, however, with the return of peace in 1865, new opportunity had come, and the generous people of Unity took pains to see that it should not be missed.

Eagerly did he look forward to the journey. In a letter ⁵ to a friend he wrote that he was going

“to lie among the heather and hear the lark, and drink in at old wells, and eat oat-bread and milk, and hunt up old cronies, and tumble round in a river I know of, and go to the church where I was baptised, on one or more Sundays, and hear the parson preach—he does not mind that I am a heretic, and if he did I should not care—and there is a little tavern where the landlord knew my folks forty years ago, and I shall put up with that landlord for a spell, as it is a pleasant place, and haunted by pleasant ghosts as anybody didn’t see, and I shall toddle through some woods I know of, between an old abbey and an old tower, where I used to go a-courting.”

On a day, therefore, in late June, on the steamship *New York*, Robert Collyer set sail for the shore which he had last seen some fifteen years before. He was alone, for the wife and mother must stay behind to mind the children, who were too young for journeying. What sensations

⁵ Undated.

50 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

were in his heart as he thus started homeward after so long an absence, he has himself revealed to us. Desire to see historic and scenic England, the land of cathedrals and literary shrines, of Devon and the lakes, which he had never once beheld through all his native days—ambition to know English Unitarians, visit their churches, and learn their thoughts and ways—a curious longing to “see the mountains Ruskin saw, and Coleridge, and feel their burden at first hand and drink in their splendour”—all these were present with him. But certain feelings, intensely personal in nature, were predominant over all other emotions. Inevitable was a certain joy, akin to pride, and yet not alien to humble gratitude, that he could go back to the old home with head erect and a story of success upon his lips. He had not been without fears, when he started away so many years ago, that he might be doomed to failure, and thus to fulfilment of doleful prophecies which were showered upon him by solicitous friends. “I could remember,” he says, “how I had seen a man as I started, who had just returned from the states; he did not like the country, did not believe I should like it, thought I had better stay where I was and save money. So thought some of the neighbours, directly descended, no doubt, from those that

handled poor Pliable so badly in Bunyan's grand old book; but somehow I wasn't pliable. I bit my lip, braced up my heart, saw to my boxes, especially my books, said if God helps me as I believe He will, I mean to stay where I am going. And here . . . I had stood watching that very spire of Trinity draw near as now it was receding. Fifteen years and more had gone, and I was going back to see the faces that had been growing ever more dim in my recollections, and to give in my evidence as to the prospect this new world offers to the weary and heavy-laden millions of the old. And as I remembered all this, and all the way in which God had led me, with a heart surely as glad and thankful as ever man felt beating in his breast, I said, If I forget thee, let my right hand forget her cunning."

Even more intense, however, than this mingling of thankfulness and pride, was the plain out-and-out hunger of his soul for the old home scenes and the old home faces. To look again upon the dales, with the long slopes to the uplands, and the great stretches of the heather rolling to the far horizon—to see the crags, hunt the flowers, hear the birds, and even smell the fog and rain of dirty Yorkshire weather—to stand again within the smithy, drink from the clear springs near Wash-

52 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

burn stream, and wait for an echo across the moors of Haworth chapel bells—to greet old friends remembered and beloved, to stand uncovered and in prayer beside the quiet grave in Ilkley town, above all to take within his stalwart arms the mother who had waited patiently and proudly through all these years to see her son again—these were the passions of this first return. Straight, therefore, from Liverpool to Leeds he went, immediately upon landing, to meet the dear mother first of all and live with her again the days in Washburndale. Then, to Ilkley and the Wharfedale, and finally over the heather-strewn moors to Fewston! It was a real home-coming, and a glad one too, “for I found,” he says in a series of articles on his journeyings, “every one of my kith and kin alive when I left, living still, and in every way as full of a fair content as life well can be. And with those also, that other circle every man can count outside his home circle, friends that had turned a kindly face to me and encouraged me when encouragement was very sweet, even these were living in numbers greater than I had dared to hope for. I owe a very great deal to such friendship; it lighted many a dark day, and ever since I began to think that I might one day go back again to where such friends lived, I longed to find

them still living that I might somehow let them understand how grateful I felt. I did not know until I got to England whether some of those were living or dead, and I would ask, Is the old man yet alive? I suppose with some such feeling as that of the Hebrew when he saw his brethren. It was wonderful how many were alive. I seemed to get all at once a new idea of death—to think of the king of terrors in an almost amiable spirit. Was ready to believe that there might after all be some touch of tenderness and forbearance about him, else how should he spare men so long and so many, and it seemed, too, as if it were worth all the journey just to see these friends again. It was like what I suppose the meeting will be after the great parting."

Old places were almost as precious, also, as old faces. "Shall I tell you," he queries, "how I remembered where I had gathered wild flowers thirty-five years ago, went to the old sunny bank, and lo! they were growing there still, just the same flowers in just the same spot. I remembered leafy coverts where I used to find hazel-nuts and birds' nests. I went there—the nuts were still growing, the nests had this very year been built, and I doubted not but there were sharp young eyes to spy out the nests, and nimble hands to get the nuts. There was one oak

neither chance and change so busy ever
ng since swept it away. It was still th
did not look a day older, but waved
ousand branchlets in the wind with eve
its old pride. I went into the old
urch; the crusader lay still in his coat
I first saw him, and as they left h
undred years ago; I went into the smal
here I first tried to preach, and one
embered me remembered the text too.
red over the moors, vast stretches of wil
nd that shut in the green valley; the wil
ent whirring over the heather just as the
; the great crags rose in the old familiar
e mosses were soft to the foot, and the l
oom beautiful to the sight as in the ol
ld Leland tells of a clump of willow
at grew by the river in his time. I w
e spot and found them growing there s
This account of his ramblings through
iliar places in the West of England

in personal details not possible in the more formal public statement.

"I should by good right have answered your letter at once, but have been very busy and wanted to write pretty long when I did write, so as to tell you all I can. I had as good a time as ever you can imagine. I found everything and everybody so nearly what I had longed for and dreamed about that I could not tell you how thankful it made me.

"I got to Leeds on Thursday. On the Saturday I went to Ilkley on Dobson's coach, then still running. William Dobson was the whip. He did not know me and I did not tell him who I was, but just rode along and drank in the pleasure of the dear old familiar things. I remembered standing in 1850 on that fine point where turning from Leeds you see such a noble reach of Wharfedale all at once, and wondering if I should ever see it again, and if so under what circumstances. When we came down from Bramhope and the view burst on my sight, the old memory came back as though it were yesterday. Otley was not altered in the least that I could see since then. They have pulled down the White Horse and are building a good hotel on the site, but all else was unchanged. In Burley, too, the things looked just as usual. The Red Lion and Malt Shoal, the shops and houses, and the very trees stayed still in their old place with the old look on them.

"But, of course, Ilkley was the great point. As I rode up I would see places where I used to wander read-

56 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ing and dreaming. Then I saw a field I helped to drain, the steeple of the old church, and the town. As we rode into the village, at a new house built just past Bettlewells, on the other side, I saw a man, and said at once, that is John Dobson. When we had got away from the coach, I went back to that house, asked the man if I could have lodgings. He said, Nay, we are full. Then he looked at me and I at him. Then he caught at his heart and sat down and said, I feel faint, but I know you. You may be sure he was glad to see me. I went to a house belonging to his brother Michael, who is now dead, and stayed there. After tea I went to see Rebecca Batty. She did not know me. She is not so much altered as her sister Mary, who is very old, 76 and looks it. . . . We talked a good bit of old times, of you and the chapel and Methodism. She is a class leader and runs the machine about as she always did. Then I went down to Parratt's House; just the same inside and out. The sons, George and Ben, not altered in the least, except older; Margaret as like herself as possible. Still she is getting on in years. She manages the place, feels the loss of her mother a good deal, is very lonely and sad. I was sad to see her. Her mother, she said, got queer in her last days, but died with a sure hope. Then I went to see Mary Hudson. Old Will was in too. It was very pleasant to see them. Mary looks old, and, as you know, is lame, but is very active and bright, keeps a shop and holds her own. Will is not really a Methodist. He is under Mary, however, who makes him do

something toward saving his soul. . . . The old man has a genuine manliness that is really good to see. Has helped no end of shiftless Hudsons in his time, and altogether I like him better than ever I did before in my life. He believes you are the greatest man that ever came along. Mary is good, pious and true, full of a gracious spirit.

"I went to the chapel. It is very little changed; on the outside, not at all; on the inside, slightly. A man named Way was in the pulpit. I thought he was a narrow way.

"I did not go to Addingham that time; had to wait for my brother, so went back to Leeds. But after that I went to Addingham twice—once with my mother in a carriage, as we went to Fewston by way of Bolton—then again from Ilkley through the fields and along the bit of old Roman road. That time I went to Brother William. I called as I went up at Dick Rooking's. Mary Ann sent somebody down to the mill for William while I went on up to the house. But here I am up at Rooking's—I must go back. Addingham looks just as it did. You remember the green lawn at the Cunliff house—it comes close to the street and there is a big tree. It is all as you left it, and I noticed through the window a big Cunliff had just dined and was dormant in his chair. Big Lusters or Hodgesons or Cockshalls were here and there to be seen on the long street. In your shop window was a bill about services in the Ranter chapel, when a woman would preach and silver be thankfully received on entering

58 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

the gallery. The very old gaol with the old date remains, and sailor Bill's hotel, and all the rest of 'em. And poor old Dick Rooking's 'braun' is dead and all his pigs, and the old man had a woeful tale to tell thereby—told me, too, with tears in his eyes how you had given him five shillings to buy a pig the very last thing as you went away. I gave him what would help him a little, too, and he took me to see brother Purdy, with whom I used to take sweet counsel when he was after Jane Netherwood and I was courting my first wife. In William's house I saw the nice old things you must remember ever since you were a boy—a library, mahogany side-board, table, chairs, etc., a picture of some old divine, two red vases with artificial flowers in them, and other articles I cannot remember. William was very glad to see me. We had a very pleasant chat all about you. . . . He would honour a dog that had seen Flesher. He lives on seeing you again. He grows like what I remember his father was in 1838; will be very like him in ten years. From the house you remember that great view down Wharfedale—I looked at it for you. I wished to see Mr. Level, but could not spare a day, or either to see Mr. Duckworth.

"I was very busy going about. . . . But I saw Bolton Abbey and all the beauty of that region. Walked from the Bridge over through Blubberhouses, by Darley to the railroad, and rode with mother over the same road to Hopper Lane and Fewston. Drank in at all the pores of my spirit the good renewal of my

childhood. . . . I also got pictures of the best scenes. Several of Bolton Abbey and woods, of Loredale scar, etc., quite a number of Ilkley and the moors and Haworth. Whenever I can see you I will take care to have them with me, or if you have the good fortune to come up here it will be better. . . .”

Thus did Collyer regale his soul with old friends and places. “The face of old England,” as he well said, “was very sweet, the green fields never did seem to be so green before, the great woods never quite so beautiful; and the noble mansions and snug farmsteads, the shreds of old-time grandeur in castle and abbey, the cities and towns and brooks and rivers all whispered afresh how a man must leave the place in which he lived through his earlier life before he can fairly understand what a hold it has upon his heart; that in life as with life, it is expedient that we go away.”

Other places than his native Yorkshire, however, saw this returned emigrant, although it was here amid old scenes that he spent his longest and happiest hours. Cathedrals—York, Durham, Westminster—attracted and held his reverent gaze. The homes and graves of immortal Englishmen were shrines of pilgrimage. Old monuments and half-forgotten relics of local fame were hunted down with a zeal worthy of

60 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

archæological research. He was "a whole week in London." He was received as a welcome guest in the home of Mrs. Gaskell.⁶ No outside interest was greater, however, than that which attached to the Unitarian churches of England, which were eager to see and hear this blacksmith preacher who had come over to their fold from Methodism. Invitations to preach were showered upon him, and so many of them did he accept that, as he tells it, "I had but one half-Sunday to myself, when I attended a service in the Stamford Street Church, and listened to a most earnest and telling sermon from the minister there, Mr. Spears." "Preached in Leeds 4 times," he writes Flesher Bland, "Pudsey twice, Manchester twice, and London three times." The first Sunday in Leeds was the great day of them all, for in the congregation were his mother and John Dobson.

His desire to lift up his eyes, like the Psalmist, "unto the hills," took him out of England for a three weeks' excursion through France and Germany, stopping here and there at cathedral

⁶ "I am sorrowing with you for the death of dear Mrs. Gaskell. I had the most pleasant visit at her house I think I ever had anywhere. She spoke of you with the greatest affection. It is a sad loss to the world as well as to us, if death in the divine order ever can be a loss."—R. C. to Edward Everett Hale, December 13, 1865.

towns like Rouen and Cologne, to Switzerland. He had never seen any great mountains—nothing but “the sweet, heathery hills of the north of England, with their grey crags and purple bloom, their free-blowing winds and rippling sunshine, and great spaces without a house, or tree, or human being, except at rare intervals a shepherd looking after his sheep, or a farmer crossing from dale to dale.” These hills were dear to him, because he “saw the mist lie on them first when (he) was a child, and wandered over them dreaming about (his) future when (he) was a boy, and preached (his) first sermon on them to the sheep when (he) was a young man. . . . They are as dear to me,” he said, “as Hermon and Sharon were to the Hebrews in the old days. . . . But they were not mountains. You would find snow there in the deep shadows when the meadows were all abloom down by the river, but the snow was gone by the middle of May and the sheep were cropping the sweet new grass that grows here and there among the heather and the crags, and the brown waters were tumbling down the hills racing toward the sea. . . . It is only that pride of our own place which makes a Scotchman think Ben Lomond is grander than a peak of the Andes, which made mountains to me out of those great purple hills.”

62 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

There were real mountains, however, in Switzerland! Therefore "when the first chance came and I was ready, I started from Frankfort, in Germany, to Zürich, in Switzerland, on a Saturday morning, and rode all day through a beautiful country, looking out toward nightfall for the vision of the mountains far away. But night came in as we got into Switzerland, and long before we came to our journey's end, it was quite dark. So I went to rest, longing for sunrise; and at sunrise dressed and went out. . . . It was a clear morning in mid-summer, warm and bright, and touched with a sweet blue haze. They had told me at the Inn that if I would go to the cathedral, I could see the mountains. I saw the cathedral at once, and the hill, and went up.

"Now we all remember times when our whole nature was stormed by some quick surprise, so that we could hardly see the thing we were looking at through our tears, and so it was with me that Sunday morning. For there, away out beyond, standing clear in the rising sun, were the mountains—or shall I say the crests of the mountains? for their base was hidden by the roundness of the earth—white and still, standing up in the sky, looking as if they belonged to a world I had never seen before, flashing white against the green of summer from their eternal snows, and

then I said in my heart, 'Now I know what they mean by mountains, and what Ruskin means when he likens them to the shadow of God.'

"I was not satisfied, of course, with this look at the mountains on the edge of the world; I could not rest until I had seen them to their most secret heart. Not that I wanted to scale Mont Blanc, to shiver on the brink of unfathomable crevices, or to stand on peaks that few men ever scaled, for I like to look *at* these dizzy wonders rather than *from* them, and to feel sure first I run no risk that is not fair to a man with a family and a solid day's work to do, when there is no higher call than curiosity, be that never so intense. . . . I simply wanted to see Mont Blanc face to face in all his glory, and I did see Mont Blanc. Starting from Lucerne you go winding among the valleys in the most curious fashion, catching glimpses of queer little towns and villages that seem as if they had been made on purpose to delight Americans, and especially those who, as I was then, are tired and sick of the everlasting sameness of the western plains.

"When you come to Martigny, within nine hours' walk from the foot of this grand mountain, you have to take to the hills on foot, or on horseback, as it suits you. It suited me, for

64 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

many reasons, to go on foot. One was, that the horse and his rider, in my case, never seem to be of the same mind, and I cannot understand why he should want to bruise me against rocks and trees. Another was, that a good horse is apt to be all nerves, and while he is starting at an old newspaper, I am getting down. And the last is, as you will perhaps have guessed, that I am, perhaps, the worst rider ever seen on horseback.

“But the walk over the Tête Noir is one of the events of a lifetime—so full of wonder and delight that I only remember the most of it as a fine ethereal intoxication. Every mile of it was a new surprise—little green valleys far down on one side of us, great grim scars far up on the other, poor little cottages set where one would imagine it was impossible for any human being to pick up a living; troops of little children with small round faces and great round eyes, running out as they saw us come, holding out their hands shyly for anything we might give them—wayside chapels and shrines in unexpected places, startling you sometimes with a figure of the dead Christ, when you expected the Mother and the Child; clear running wells of water just off the ice close to the wayside, and very welcome to man and beast. Oh, what a day that was, walking over the Tête Noir and watching along

in the afternoon for the first flash of the great white glory that was drawing us to his feet!

"At the end of seven hours' walk you came to a sharp turn by a little town, and then the mountains that have hidden away the sight you came to see, stand back, and there is Mont Blanc.

"It was a disappointment for a few minutes, as Niagara is. You have been expecting that Nature will do something in the melodramatic line, and send one peak, sharp and clear, into the sky, as they would on the stage. Nature knows better; her work is for the ages, and so she lays vast foundations, and builds to her base, and then just raises the great summit over all—peerless in its way, when you come to think of it, as the sun—and lets you fret until you have grace to see what she means by that magnificent moderation. I think I did see it, at last, as she intended we should, for when we got to Chamounix, and had rested, we went across the valley, in among the vines and roses, and there we sat down.

"It was evening, the sun had set to us, and the night drew on, but up there he was shining still, transfiguring all the white with his gold, lingering as if he loved it and was loath to leave it, kissing the snow with fire. And then the gold changed to rosy splendours that seemed like the

light through stained windows, and then the stars came out, as the Alpen glow, as they called it, deepened, and starlight and sunlight lay together on the lovely desolation. They told me travellers would spend weeks, sometimes, in the valley and not see this sight more than once, and it is reckoned the supreme glory of Mont Blanc. It is to me, still, one of the wonders of my life—it stands alone.

“One mountain I did climb in that journey. I had been told I must see the sight from the top of the Rigi at sunrise or I should be very sorry for it always. It was a hard pull of, perhaps, seven hours, on a very hot day, but like the walk over the Tête Noir, and all the walks, indeed, I ever took among these mountains, the journey itself was worth far more than the trouble and fatigue.

“It was dark when we got to the summit. We told the porter to call us an hour before sunrise, exactly. It must have been two hours after sunrise when we woke up, and then we went storming down, met the porter and shouted to him, ‘Why did you not call us an hour before sunrise?’ ‘Oh! sare,’ he said to the speaker, ‘there was no sunrise.’ And so it was, we went to the door, and it seemed as if the flood had come. The rain was coming down in what you

might call torrents, and we felt sad enough. But it was a tempered trial, after all, as most of our trials are when we are not wilful and wrong-headed, or, what is worse, wrong-hearted about them. For in about a couple of hours, when we made up our minds, at any rate, to go down and reach Lucerne, and had been a few minutes on the road, all at once the rain stopped and then the great clouds broke away into white masses and were, some of them, swept down below our feet, and some up into heaven; and then we were transfigured where we stood.

"The guide book told me, I think, that we could see, between the two rims of the sky, three hundred miles. There, sharp down below us, looking almost as if a rolling stone would reach them, lay towns and towers in the great green valleys, churches and homes, farmsteads and glorious lakes, a panorama of wonder and beauty for which, indeed, I have no words.

"The Rigi is green to the top, a pasture ground for the little cows and goats; the blue bells were thick about our feet, fresh that morning from their bath, and looking up shyly to the sun as if they would say, 'We are very glad you have come out, it was getting rather dreary.'

"But right across the valley and the lake, as we came down, lay the great masses of white

68 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

snow, set in their frames of black and brown rock, with the shaggy woods underneath, reaching down to the meadows, the towns, and the water, with monasteries hidden away among pleasant nooks.

"And so at last," he continues, "I came to love as a reality the mountains I had loved all my life as a dream." And the people, too, "These Switzers," these also he came to love. "How they have fought for freedom among their mountains, and won it, and kept it! . . . And how simple and true they are, in despite of the tourists! I left my knife at a little place where I had eaten bread and cheese with a nice old woman who was breaking stones for a living, and keeping a tiny restaurant. It was very precious to me as the gift of a friend, and I did not like my loss at all, nor was I sure I had left it there. But when I came down from the snow next day, the old woman saw me at some distance, gave a cry, rushed into the place and brought out my knife folded carefully away in a bit of linen. She was just as glad as I was to restore that knife."

And so the summer passed, with wanderings in old familiar, much-loved haunts, reunions with friends and kinsfolk, journeyings to cathedral-towns and mountain-lands, preachings in the pul-

pits of his faith. These days were among the happiest of his long and crowded life. Other and later expeditions were crowded with more important events, brought him greater honours, and bestowed upon him a far larger measure of public attention and applause. But none of them all gave him such fresh and vivid experiences of joy. With what jubilation, he writes after his return, to a friend, Miss Alice Baker:

“Nothing ever did me so much good as my journey to England. It set me all true in stomach, spirit, liver and life. It fulfilled a score of old dreams in a way that seemed perfectly wonderful. It was all fortune, with not one misfortune, even to being caught in a shower or losing a train. I had all the money I wanted, both to spend and give away. I found every one of the household I left fifteen years ago alive and well, with lots of new ones, among which were two Robert Collyers. And I had surely the best time the Lord ever allowed any poor mortal to have on this earth.”

After three months thus spent, Collyer returned to Chicago, and was given a royal welcome by the people of Unity. As he mounted the pulpit on the first Sunday after his arrival, he looked upon a great congregation, and a church beautifully adorned in his honour. Immediately

70 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

before the pulpit stood a flowery cross, resting on a bed of evergreens. An ivy pendant hanging from the arms of the cross and trailing along the front of the desk, told of the land from which the beloved minister had lately returned. Taking for his text the words in *Job*, "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it," Collyer told of the joy of his visit to his boyhood home, of the quickened love of England which had come into his heart, and also of the reinforcement which this experience in lands familiar and lands strange, had brought to his devotion to America. It had been wonderful to get back, of course; but nothing of all this had tempted him to regret his leave-taking of fifteen years before, or to consider at this or any later time a permanent return to the mother-country. He knew himself more than ever to be henceforth and forever an American. "The fruits of my journey," he said, "might have been such as to have made you sorry that you had let me go. (But) when I was away I found that every fibre and every part of my life was ramified with my new home and with this new world."

CHAPTER XI

UNITY CHURCH

1865-1871

"Of these years I shall try to tell the story as the memories touch me—of the new-born church—her steadfast continuance in well-doing."—R. C. in "Some Memories," page 117.

MULTITUDINOUS and exacting were the duties which awaited the minister of Unity Church on his return from Europe. For the first time in over four years, parochial business took precedence over public; sermons, calls, church meetings, parish problems, social work, were more important than affairs of state and nation. Collyer's well-won distinction as a preacher and a citizen made inevitable a considerable amount of outside activity, and this increased, of course, rather than diminished as the years went on. But his parish had now first call upon his time and strength, and his public eminence was not for a moment permitted to interfere with faithful per-

72 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

sonal performance of the duties, sometimes large, more often small, which were imposed.

His interest in the work undertaken for the children is an excellent illustration of his zeal for, and devotion to, the ideal of a busy church. Very early in the life of Unity a Sunday school was started, as we have seen; and in course of time the prophecy of the young matron, who had tempered the minister's impatience with wisdom, was abundantly fulfilled. The school was crowded with the children of the people who thronged the pews. But this was not enough for Robert Collyer! All about the church were families of Germans with boys and girls swarming in the households like fledglings in a nest. These must be made welcome to the school, if they would come; and so from the beginning was the Sunday school made "an open trust," with no line drawn between friend and stranger. An emigrant himself, the heart of this great Yorkshireman went out in sympathy and understanding to those whose homes were far across the seas, and who were seeking, even as he had sought, in this new land, a chance for freer and fuller life, and all of them would he have gladly gathered within his fold. What was for various reasons impossible with the parents, was not at all difficult with the children, and thus did these whole-

some youngsters constitute for years a substantial part of the Unity school. Mrs. Collyer was here a valiant helper. A large class of the youngest of these aliens was her especial charge, and the noble mother-love which blessed her own offspring in the home, was shared abundantly with these, the children of the spirit.

An extension of this work took the church into a slum section not many blocks away, where the children were sadly neglected. Remembering his labours among the poor as minister-at-large of the First Church, which he had given up with such reluctance, Collyer saw here an opportunity for service of the most beneficent kind. At his suggestion, a large room was rented in the very heart of the district, and opened as a home where the little ones could be cared for during the day and safely returned to their abodes at night. Washing, feeding, dressing, teaching, nursing, were all a part of the programme of every day, and faithful workers from the church, including Mrs. Collyer among the first, were placed in charge. Trials and tribulations were many, especially in the sweltering months of summer, but these were met by patience, courage and steady vision, and thus always, sooner or later, overcome. No work during all these years was nearer to Collyer's heart than this among the children of the

74 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

poor. It was his wisdom which solved vexed problems, his sunny optimism which sustained volunteer workers in moments of disillusionment and despair, his personal attention and solicitude which at last achieved success. In due season, a matron was employed to take regular charge of what was now become an established institution. Little by little, a paid staff was developed. And at last, through the munificent generosity of Eli Bates,¹ one of the founders and through many years one of the most liberal supporters of Unity, a handsome and permanent building was erected for the proper housing of the work. "And now," writes Dr. Collyer in his autobiography, "no sweeter memories of my ministry through the twenty years in our old home city abide in my heart than these of the good day-home."

In December, 1866, was founded the Liberal Christian League, a society composed mainly of members of Unity Church, with Mr. Collyer as president. In the beginning this League was an expression of Collyer's unflagging interest in the poor. His approach to this problem of poverty was not exactly that of the trained economist or social worker of our time, although he anticipated to a truly remarkable degree some of those

¹ Best known as the donor to Chicago of the St. Gauden's statue of Lincoln.

now familiar principles which are to be regarded as the best fruitage of the sociological studies and labours of the last generation. Thus as early as 1866, in a sermon on "Poor Irish and Other Poor," he dares to affirm that "*our*" standards of worthiness are not fairly to be applied to the poor—that "if we could know all, we should find that he (the poor man) is a victim quite as much as a criminal"—and that "a real kindness" to the poor is not that which "will merely give them what they need, as a man will give a crust to a hungry dog, but that (which) tries to touch the causes as well as the consequences of their wretchedness, as the surgeon while applying the embrocation to the surfaces will send his medicine to search out and arrest the flame that feeds the agony away down in the centres of the system." It is evident that Collyer's labours as minister-at-large had enlisted his head as well as his heart, and made him observe and think as well as toil. But in the last analysis, nevertheless, it was sentiment rather than science which was at work. Not doctrine but life was with him the matter of chief concern. The one clear message in this sermon just referred to, which springs from the very soul of the speaker, is that of pity, love and service for the unfortunate and stricken among our fellows. Worthy or un-

76 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

worthy, guilty or not guilty, they must be helped, else is our virtue become Pharisaism, and our religion a mockery and snare. "I have mistaken the whole genius and spirit of the faith of Christ," he exclaimed, "if this is (not) to be our rule of action. It is not justice but mercy, that I am to find in my heart; not condemnation but salvation that I am set to strive for. Whatever I can do for the unworthy, ay, and the unthankful too . . . that is the thing God has given me to do for this class of the poor. . . . These men and women, my experience teaches me, almost invariably nurse in their heart some sense of wrong. They feel that they had not been what they are, had something else been otherwise. This is sometimes an excuse of the heart to itself, and sometimes a reason; but a real wise kindness is the only thing I know of to meet either."

Now the Liberal Christian League was in the beginning at least an expression of this practical religion of the minister of Unity. It was an endeavour to carry out with effectiveness his ideal of a serviceable church. Relief of the poor was its primary object; but Collyer's experience was too sound and his vision too true, as we have just seen, for him to be content with the mere deeds of charity, however beautiful. Therefore under his leadership did the League press on to prob-

lems of reform. Improvement of housing and sanitary conditions, care of friendless women, wholesome play and recreation, prevention of disease, especially cholera—these and other topics were matters of eager study and investigation. In some cases, as in the matter of entertainment, the League undertook the practical work of providing lectures and amusements at low prices for the poor. In other cases, it prepared and published reports, which did much to disseminate knowledge and quicken interest among the citizens of Chicago. Always it manifested an intelligence, sympathy and courage which were a clear reflection of that central light which burned with radiant flame in the heart of Robert Collyer.

In April, 1867, the League launched out upon an adventure not clearly anticipated in the beginning. This was the establishment and maintenance of popular Sunday evening preaching services for the masses who could not be reached through the church in the ordinary way. "Liberal preaching under the auspices of this League, would tend largely to advance one of the principal objects which it was organised to promote," was the wording of the resolution which inaugurated this work. Expenses were met by voluntary contributions; and ten men,

78 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Benjamin F. Andrews, James P. Fogg, C. J. Hull, Josiah L. Lombard, William G. Lewis, James H. Moore, Samuel Shackford, James Brooks, George E. Adams, and Edwin Le Baron, guaranteed any deficiency that might occur. Library Hall, favourably located in a populous part of the city, was engaged for the purpose, and Robert Collyer, with occasional aid from Robert Laird Collier, minister of the First Church, preached regularly on Sunday evenings throughout the winter months of 1867 and 1868. The audiences, mostly "composed of young men and persons not connected with any church,"² were large and interested. "In the morning," writes Collyer to Flesher Bland on March 10, 1868, "I have a congregation as full as the church will hold, and in the evening a thousand people in a public hall." "These meetings were conducted with all the enthusiasm of a genuine revival," says the historian,³ "and liberal thought thus found its way to great masses, with whom there was no other channel of communication." Indeed, it was undoubtedly the success of the Liberal League in this propaganda work which led at this time to its development into the Chicago Christian Union, a society having the same

² See "Historical Sketch of Unity Church," page 5.

³ Ibid, page 5.

objects but composed not of the members of one single parish, but of all "the liberal Christians of Chicago," and thus to its disappearance as a specific part of Unity Church.

Denominational activities also claimed their due share of time and attention. In this field Robert Collyer was never a leader. He was on occasion a vigorous and joyful preacher of Unitarian theology, but never either by inclination or choice a propagandist. He was consulted in matters of denominational policy, and cherished always a hearty interest in denominational affairs; but he never sought or was sought after, to undertake leadership in these matters of church organisation and development. His genius did not tend in this direction. It is impossible to conceive of him absorbed in the denominational tasks which were the delight of Henry W. Bellows for so many years after the war, and the performance of which constitutes, in the eyes of all good Unitarians at least, one of Bellows's chief claims to immortality. Not for a moment, however, did Collyer drop out of the ranks. He was a regular attendant at meetings of the Western Unitarian Conference, and not seldom took the long journey eastward for the annual meeting of the American Unitarian Association. When invited to address these assem-

80 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

blies, he was glad to accept, as for example, when he spoke before "the U. Association in Boston," in May, 1863. Now and again, also, he was charged with official duties of no great importance, and these he faithfully performed. Thus at the first meeting of the National Conference in New York, in 1865, he was appointed a member of "a committee of correspondence, to promote acquaintance, fraternity and unity between Unitarians and all of like liberal faith."⁴ And from a letter addressed to Dr. Hale in this period,⁵ we learn that he had been elected chairman of a nominating committee for the Association meeting, and also that he had decided ideas about details of denominational organisation, and some spicy opinions about one or two personalities of the day.

"Dear Hale:

Your note is the first word I have had about the chairmanship. I did not know that I was elected to it. I suppose I shall hear about it in a day or

⁴James Freeman Clarke and Samuel J. May were the other members of this Committee. Mr. Clarke, as chairman, reported at the Syracuse session of the National Conference in 1866, and stated that its members had conferred with Christians, Universalists, Methodists, Congregationalists, and others.—See George Willis Cooke's "Unitarianism in America," p. 194.

⁵May 3, 1869.

two, and at the same time hear what the rest of the men think about a ticket.

"I like your suggestion, especially that part of it that would concentrate and consolidate our work. But I do not think it can be done by simply tipping the Council of the N. C. (National Conference) into the A. U. A., because I think two at least of the members of the Council are no more use there, except as dead-heads, than the fifth wheel of a cart. Seven or eight men in the N. C., by all means, should be in both boards, because they are the best men we have on all accounts. . . . Always thine in love."

Lecturing had by now become an important item in Collyer's calendar of activities. He had begun this work at Unity in the early days of his pastorate, as a kind of overflow expression of his love of literature. Talks to his people on books and authors developed into lectures of a more or less formal character. Such lectures were occasionally announced for Sunday evening gatherings in the church;⁶ and by 1865, we find him giving a series of lectures on the great writers of the day. Success in his own pulpit drew him

⁶No regular Sunday evening services were held until after the opening of the new church in 1869. "The church adopted one rule, and to the working of that rule it is largely indebted for its success. That rule was to ask of the pastor but one service a day."—See address of Mr. Artemus Carter at laying of corner-stone of the new Unity Church, August 29, 1867.

82 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

out on to the public platform, and by the middle of the Civil War period we find him arranging regular lecture dates and thus taking frequent mid-week journeys to places near and far. As early as January 29, 1863, he writes to Jasper Douthit:

"If I go out much more this winter and can choose where I will lecture, I will try to get down to Shelbyville."

After the war, he became still more active. He had more time at his disposal—the public mind, released from the long strain of the southern conflict, was hungry for this form of entertainment and instruction—and his summer in Europe had given Collyer an abundance of travel material to supplement that drawn exclusively hitherto from his library. Furthermore, the generous income from this source was a welcome addition to the family exchequer, which was never full. On the one hand, Unity Church, with its great building project to carry through, was not yet in a position to pay an ample salary. On the other hand, were the needs of a large family, the minister's unconscionable extravagance in books, and his unreckoning generosity on behalf of good causes and needy souls. It is probable that, had it not been for this necessity of

supplementing his salary during these days, he would have abandoned lecturing altogether as a regular occupation; for, strangely enough, Collyer seems never to have enjoyed this as he did his preaching. Like every public speaker, of course, he loved people gathered together in a public audience—loved to warm their hearts, and make them laugh and cry. He revelled in the exhilaration which comes from the quick response, in silence or applause, of sympathetic listeners. But he had a peculiarly strong attachment to the regular audience, whose faces and lives he knew, as contrasted with the transient audience of strangers. He never overcame the shyness which made his appearance on each new platform a serious nervous strain. And he detested the innumerable inconveniences and discomforts incident to travel and long absence from home. It was something more, therefore, than a passing mood of weariness and disgust which dictated his statement to Jasper Douthit, in a letter of December 3, 1867—

“I do not like to lecture at all. I hate it like ‘pizen,’ and this year I have more of it than I can ever get through.”

It was a settled judgment which is voiced in his word to Dr. Hale, in February, 1868, that he

84 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

"mortally hates lecturing," and hopes soon to be able to give it up. Through all this period, however, he keeps steadily at it—and with ever mounting success. It was at this time, indeed, that he laid the foundations for his later reputation as one of the most popular public lecturers in the heyday of the famous Lyceum platform. How far he was drawn into this work, and how much of a business he finally made of it, is described by the almost professional tone of a note to Rev. Henry G. Spaulding, in answer presumably to a request for a lecture at his church.

"My dear Spaulding:

"I will be sincerely glad to do it. The whole thing, however, will be in the hands of Mr. Redpath, to whom please apply. I know your bright, good town by sight. Hope I may have to stop there" . . .

Authorship also now made its regular demands upon the time and strength of this busy preacher, pastor, lecturer and public servant. It is positively startling to note the ease and surety with which this unlettered Yorkshireman put his pen to paper in the earliest days of his Chicago ministry, and the rapidity with which he developed and perfected that matchless Anglo-Saxon style which remained throughout all his days, in writing and in speech alike, the finest flower of his

genius. The evidence of his pitifully meagre education continues for some time in the form of loose grammatical constructions and persistent misspelling even of simple words. But within him, as within his mother, were the well-springs of poesy; these were fed unceasingly from the full streams of English literature; and they poured themselves forth in a flow which was as pure and lovely as it was abundant. Robert Collyer was ever at his best as a public speaker. It was in the pulpit and on the platform that the wholeness of his personality was revealed. To see him was well-nigh as rich an experience to an audience as to hear him. But had he been dumb, so that he could not woo the ears of men with that utterance which always was his chief joy, he would not have lacked a medium of expression. He would still have won men's hearts by the printed if not by the spoken word.

His first writings, of course, were sermons. The earliest which I have seen are two published in 1860, entitled respectively "The Good Samaritan" and "The Divine Providence." His trip to Washington, in the summer of 1861, was described in letters to the *Chicago Tribune*. In the fall of 1862, there appeared in the *Christian Inquirer* a series of papers, entitled "From the Lakes to the Sea," which reveal for the first

86 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

time that mastery of style—simple, clear and beautiful—which later became so fully his. "Providence," "Thoughts in an Iron Mill," "Our Young Doctor," "About Weddings," were some of the subjects which he discussed. Late in 1864, we find him writing

"My dear Jasper:

" . . . I want you to send me all the items you can lay hold of about secret Copperheadism in your region. I have to do an article about loyalty in the North and South West for the July number of the *Christian Examiner*, and want to make it as good as I can. You can help me a great deal. Write soon an' thou lovest me."

The summer in Europe produced three articles for the *Christian Inquirer*—one descriptive of the old haunts of Ilkley and Fewston, another giving "a brief account of some English churches of the Episcopal and our own order and how they impressed me," and the third telling of the life and labour of the working classes in Yorkshire. With the growth of Collyer's fame and influence during the war and after, the publication of his sermons became frequent both in the Chicago newspapers and in the liberal religious journals. Finally in 1867 he published through Horace B. Fuller, Boston, his first book, a collection of ser-

mons entitled "Nature and Life."⁷ This enjoyed a great sale—eight editions in eighteen months, which seems almost incredible in this day of indifference to published sermons—and was followed four years later (1871) by a second equally successful book of the same character, entitled "The Life That Now Is." Both books were at once published in England, and later, in 1877, brought together into a single volume and thus republished by H. W. Walker, Briggate, Leeds. In 1868 appeared an attractive biography entitled "A Man in Earnest: A. H. Conant." This was a work of piety, and appealed to a limited public.

Glimpses of Collyer's activity during these years are given in his letters, from which are taken the following extracts—

To Flesher Bland, April 22, 1867.

" . . . I am going to preach in Boston two Sunday nights in the theatre. The Suffolk Conference pays all my expenses. They are having wonderful meetings; thousands have to go away. . . . I had a letter the other day from John Dobson. He has been to Switzerland, and had a great time seeing the glory of the Lord in the mountains and hearing him in the

'Touchingly dedicated "to Nahor Augustus Staples, now in heaven, as a token of undying love."

88 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

mulberry trees. . . . Here all is well as usual. I am to get out a volume of sermons this spring, and will take care you have one. The new church is coming along. I wish you could come when it is ready and preach in it once as a sort of dedication to your spirit—not your sect, for that is quite another thing. . . . I preached last night for the Spiritualists—a sort of highways and hedges people—a sermon I had previously preached to my own church, but that was welcome to them also, and, I hope, did them good.”

To Flesher Bland, June 25, 1867.

“. . . I would have written, but was not at all sure of my movements, as I had to lecture at Springfield.

“I shall be down again in September on my way to New York, where I preach three Sundays at ‘All Souls.’ My wife, I hope, will be with me. . . .

“About the Encyclopedias. Appleton’s is the biggest and, for American subjects, the best, but it is now together with the Annuals in twenty volumes, at six dollars a volume, while Chambers is in ten volumes, at five dollars a volume. Besides which, Chambers is perfectly fresh and new. I shall buy Chambers, and shall be glad to render you any aid and comfort among the booksellers.

“Thanks for the good word about ‘Nature and Life.’ . . . The new church goes on nicely and will be a ‘big thing,’ the largest Protestant church in

the city. Miss Stirk is dead, and auld Tommie Watkinson of Ling Park."

To Flesher Bland, July 3, 1867.

". . . I sent a dozen copies of 'Nature and Life' by a young gentleman from Burnley in Lancashire, seven to be given to John Dobson for himself and other friends I named, and four to Manchester, one of these to Meta Gaskell. . . . There is an order from London, too, for the book, and copies have been sent to the *Athenaeum*, *Spectator* and *Examiner*.

"To-morrow is the 4th, the great national holiday carnival—big drunk, and everything else that is extravagant, noisy and capital. I wish I was away out of it, but my sermon on '76 and '67 will not let me off. . . . Ah, when we had that meeting in Addingham in 1850, and John Baker spoke and you and Thomas Murray and me, and we all had such a good time, only I knew not where I was going and could only trust, and old John Delves prayed 'Lord, an' thy presence go not with him thaa munnot carry him hup hence,' how little we all knew of what lay before us. But I had no kinder friends than yourself and Mrs. Bland, to whom true love."

To "Dear Allie" (Alice Baker), March 6, 1868,

90 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

"... How much I care for you and for Sue, how like a brother to own sisters my heart always beats when I think of you, I think you can partly guess, but I cannot wholly tell. . . . And when you think of me as one who has said words that went into your heart, I think of you in exactly the same way. For in old days when there were plenty to criticise and not many to praise, every tone that came from you cheered me. No damnation of *faint* praise, which always makes me wish the brother would say, 'Collyer, you are an ass!' But quiet even cheerful encouragement when I came near to deserve it, and the reverse, which is just as good in its way, when I didn't.

"I am at this writing heartily well. The trouble in (the back of) my head has clean gone. I have been this week to Sandusky to lecture. Did not get fairly to my sermon until this morning, but it went right on. It is on Revelation 10:10, 'The books that are sweet to read, but bitter to digest,' and up to the 15 minutes of it that is done, looks good. . . .

"The church is as full as it can stick. Capitol people are all the time coming in, and we have all given up the half of our pews to make room for them. Nobody is afraid; nobody growls in my hearing except dear . . . , and you know he would fetch a great sigh and growl at the jewels in the great white throne. The thing will go, I feel it in my bones.

"I am glad you are writing for 'grovelling gold,' and get it. . . . If a popular author (!) can do anything with his publisher you would like to have

done, do not fail to ask me or to use my name to any extent therefor. . . . Two chaps have been to see me lately about two literary papers they propose to start here this spring, and want me to help on. They both said also, Who is there we can engage to work for us? Why should you not, if they should hatch, or either of them? . . .

"Everything here is as usual. I think I shall be in Boston in August and spend a month close to the sea with Mother. She needs the sea air this year. . . . In this very mail that brought yours is a letter asking me to preach four Sundays at Hollis Street. I think I shall do it. . . .

"You are not to believe that I am sick one atom; that trouble only held on perhaps a month and then cleared out. I eat three meals a day, sleep from ten to six, like a dormouse, drink a glass of ale almost every day, and enjoy the whole work I am doing. . . . Yours always."

To Jasper Douthit, March 12, 1869.

"I shall come down to Mattoon on the Monday night train, and I want you to come in on Tuesday morning bright and early and take me to your place, where I will visit a piece of the day if you are all well, and I can do it as easily as not.

Let nothing cause you to delay,
But march along the good old way,
As wooden-legged brother Wegg would say,
To Shelbyville.

92 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

And then I shall be glad that I went to Egypt and that into Egypt I sent my son. Thine——”

To Flesher Bland, December 28, 1869.

“This comes to you bearing our best wishes for a happy New Year and many happy returns, as many as you would like on earth, and then in heaven so many that you will not be able to count them. We are all well this bright Christmas time, and doing as well as usual. . . . We had a fair last week and a very good time. We have not yet counted our gains. They will not be very large, but we had lots of fun, and the people were brought together and the interests of the church promoted in many ways. . . . Our people start a new magazine with 1870. It is entitled *Old and New*. I have a paper in the first number, ‘Eternity in Time,’ a sort of illustration of the doctrine of predestination. It is really the heart out of a sermon. Froude’s ‘History of England’ I value very highly. It is taken mainly from original sources, is written, I think, in wonderful English, fights Romanism and all its kith and kin heroically not from theological hatred, but from a deep sense of its bad influence over any national life and true civilisation, and is far more truly with and for the people than any history I have ever read. Moreover, it marshals the old questions of the English reformation afresh before you, of Henry, Edward, Mary, Elizabeth and Scottish Mary, and compels you to reconsider your

old judgments. . . . The new edition is very nice and very cheap. I am just now reading Lecky's 'History of European Morals,' and enjoy it very much. His account of the Pagan Empire is very grand. . . . Love to the children and Mrs. Bland. Yours——"

To Miss Baker *et al.*, May 10, 1870.

"Know Young Women by these presents

"That on the morning of May 22nd, being Sunday, the undersigned will preach in Cambridge if all is well at the Harvard Square Meetin', and after meetin' he expects to go to your house to get his dinner without further care on his part. All invitations to dine elsewhere will be refused therefore. If this be not made good and a stout man of a clerical appearance be found on the grass of the University Square evidently dying for want of dinner, all consequences will be laid at your door.

From, Mesdames,

Your humble petitioner,

(if that is the way to spell it)

ROBERT COLLYER."

To Flesher Bland, July 6, 1870.

" . . . I have been knocking about to quantities of conferences and commencements, but guess I am about through. I preached the annual sermon this year for the Western Conference at Cleveland—

94 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

my best word, some think. . . . After Sunday I take seven Sundays' vacation, beginning again the first Sunday of September. I am going first to the Catskills and then to the sea; expect to have a good time. Shall go alone to the mountains, and then one of my people who has a yacht will meet me in Boston, and we shall go sailing about the New England coast. . . .

"The last of November I am due in New England to give fifteen lectures, which, by the way, are all settled and done with, at cities one hundred and fifty dollars and smaller places one hundred dollars a night. I suppose I shall clear \$1,500 by the trip, and I want it to go to England with. . . . It has been awful hot here—never saw anything like it. Cooler now, but we are all petered out."

The frequent references, in letters written both before and after the close of the Civil War, to the overflowing congregations at Unity, and the hopes and plans for a larger edifice, bring us to what was the one supreme undertaking of the years from 1865 to 1869—namely, the building of the great new church.

The first Unity, erected with such courage and sacrifice in 1859, was a modest, almost cheap, wooden structure. The interior was neat, well-lighted and not unattractive in its arrangements. The floor was carpeted, the walls and ceilings

calcimined, and the windows of white glass "fringed with symbolical colours along the borders." At one end stood the pulpit, in the middle of a raised platform, with a tastefully painted alcove at the back, semi-octagonal in form, and having a small window in one of the compartments on each side. At the other end, facing the pulpit, was the organ loft; there were no galleries. The exterior of the church was rude and uncouth, with no pretence to architectural style or embellishment. An observing visitor in 1865 described it as "one of the barest specimens of ecclesiastical architecture in the city . . . doing (little) justice either to the pastor or the people," and found himself reminded by it of a most irreverent tale. "A dear old friend of ours," he wrote, "whose servant the celebrated Robert Hall married, himself a minister of the Baptist persuasion, and a very eloquent and learned man, was once walking with us on the Cherry Hinton road, which is a noted constitution route for the University men of Cambridge, England; and on a sudden we came to a newly-built place of worship, belonging to some poor Methodist people. 'Behold!' said he, 'I have often heard of God's house, but never before did I see his barn!'"

As Chicago grew in dignity and wealth, and churches of real beauty were erected here and

there, the ugliness of Unity became increasingly manifest. More serious, however, at least from all practical viewpoints, was its inadequacy. It provided nothing but a single audience chamber—no Sunday school room, no lecture room, no place for social gatherings. This audience chamber, furthermore, was soon over-crowded. So rapid was the growth of the neighbourhood, so strong the appeal of the liberal gospel, and above all so potent the popularity of the minister, that long before the close of the war, “standing room only” became the rule of the Sunday. Such a result was a matter of great astonishment, as well as delight. “When we built our present church,” said Mr. Collyer in an address in 1867, “we felt it would be amply large enough for all our needs probably for many years to come; and I well remember, when we gathered in it for the first time, how it seemed woefully large, and how appalled I was at the spaciousness of the church, and then at the numbers of the congregation; how from Sabbath to Sabbath, as we were struggling to get a foothold, every new face that came to us I held in my soul as an especial blessing sent to encourage me and make me feel that my labour should not be in vain in the Lord. (Then) we found, by and by, that our church was growing rapidly too small for the congregation; and

I remember saying to the people, who have always been, I feel in my heart, more true to the church than any people I have ever known, that a congregation that has not room to grow, must grow stunted, and, if they did not give us more room, the church would be ruined."

The people were of one mind with their minister in this matter of the necessity of "more ample space." The first proposal was to enlarge the existing edifice by building out a wing on each side, and it was voted in 1865 to take advantage of the long vacation occasioned by Collyer's absence in Europe, to make these additions. When it came to raising the money for this work, however, it was discovered that sentiment was strongly developing in favour of abandoning the old church altogether, and erecting a new edifice which, in size, beauty and permanency, would be worthy of Robert Collyer and his place in the life of Chicago. The great prosperity of the time, and the unprecedented expansion of the city in population and wealth, conspired to make this proposal appear not only attractive but feasible. It was a time when big undertakings seemed easy. Furthermore, the people had unbounded confidence in their minister, and his ability to fill a larger church and lead a greater work than were being maintained at that time by any other reli-

98 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

gious body in the community. Therefore when Collyer returned from his summer in Europe, he found the situation as it were transformed. The proposal to build anew "was no 'will-o'-the-wisp,' but a steadfast purpose." A lot was purchased across the way, on the southeast corner of Walton Place and Dearborn Avenue. A second and adjoining lot was later bought, so that there might be no doubt of adequate ground space. A building committee was appointed, consisting of Gilbert Hubbard, Eli Bates, Nathan Mears, William G. Lewis, George Chambers, George Webster, and Harry Fox. Plans were drawn and estimates made for a stone church, "to cost not more than \$60,000."⁸ And in the latter part of May, 1867, ground was broken and the work begun.

What was in the hearts of the Unity folk at this time of dedication to a great task, is indicated in a portion of the address which was spoken by Collyer at the laying of the corner-stone. Referring to "the noble beginning we contemplate to-day, in which they (the congregation) have determined to give to God, to themselves, to the

⁸ "The story was told—I will not vouch for it—that the committee instructed (the architect) to measure the largest Protestant church in the city, and draw plans for ours a foot longer and a foot wider."—R. C., in "Some Memories," p. 177.

city and to the nation, such a room as they think will be needed for years to come," he continued:

"Our architect tells us that the area covered by our church is the largest covered by any Protestant church in this city, exclusive of the school-rooms.* The building committee, the society and the pastor feel that this is right, that they will build a large church, will give ample room to the congregation, because they believe that the congregation will come, and that the noble and beautiful faith which God has taught them through his word, through his son, through his own spirit and through men who have gone before, and are yet living, will attract so many that the church will be amply filled with worshipping believers, and that a great prosperity will attend their great enterprise.

"It was discussed earlier in the enterprise, what sort of a church we should have. Some advocated another wooden church, and some a brick church, and many felt that some temporary structure might be the wisest and best plan we could adopt. But this did not satisfy the committee or the society; and they finally concluded that they would not only build amply large enough, but they would build solid and strong,

* The First Baptist church exceeded it in size, when the chapel annexed to it was taken into account.

100 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

a church that would endure for generations to come, one in which our children and our children's children should come after us. . . . They want that the work which we are doing in this city, should be done with great solidity and permanence, and so be a reflection of what they believe to be the nature and faith of that worship which they hold, and which they do not doubt will endure through the ages to come. . . .

"And they have felt also, as they went deeper and deeper into their work, that another thing besides solidity should characterise what they did, and that was beauty; and so they have resolved to build a beautiful church, that should reflect their beautiful idea of God, of his son, and of the truth as it is in Jesus, and as it is everywhere in inspiration and instruction, so that through the eye and heart, Christ should be bodied forth, and the men and women who should come and look upon it should worship therein."

The corner-stone of the building, thus nobly conceived, was laid on August 29, 1867. In the large block of Athens marble were placed transcripts from the records of the church, a copy of "Nature and Life," a sermon by Collyer entitled "The Healthfulness of Holiness," copies of *The Christian Register*, *The Liberal Christian*, and Chicago daily newspapers, the year-book of

the Unitarian church, and a catalogue of Antioch College. The exercises, which were attended by "a considerable assemblage of people," consisted of introductory remarks by Mr. Artemus Carter, on behalf of the building committee, invocation by Dr. W. H. Ryder, of St. Paul's church, singing of the hymn, "This stone to thee in faith we lay," reading of scripture by Mr. St. John, of the Church of the Redeemer, prayer by Dr. Tiffany, a Methodist, spied out in the audience by Mr. Collyer and summoned forthwith to come forward and participate in the ceremonies, and an address by the minister. Summing up the hopes and dreams of his people on this happy day, Collyer said:

"We want that this church should be, as long as we live, a great centre of divine light and fire. We do not want to build a church that shall be cold and dark and forbidding; but (one) that shall be full of warmth and light and welcome to every human soul that shall come within its doors. We want these doors to swing wide and swing easily, and as well for the poor as for the rich, for the ignorant as for the learned, for all classes and conditions, for black and white together; thank God, I do not need to say to-day bond and free, for we are all freemen at last; but all conditions and classes that shall come to these

102 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

doors. . . . And I cannot but say, may God grant that this shall be so, and that never while I live, and while those live that come after me, shall there be a grain of exclusion, a grain of inhumanity, a grain of anything unworthy of the great gospel of Christ. . . . It seems to me that what we want as we stand together on this solemn occasion, and what we need to take close to our hearts, is the deep conviction that when this church becomes a mere minister to its own members, and mere minister to its minister, he seeking to get the most he can out of the pews, and they seeking to see how many sermons they can get out of him, each having got all they can, it will turn bitter to the taste, there will be no blessing, and it ought to die. But I trust better things, and when the church is built, it will be builded for these noble purposes, of being the centre of love and light, the fountain of blessing, to all that come to it. . . .”

The work now went steadily forward, and yet not without difficulties. Thus, it was soon discovered that the estimate of \$60,000 was altogether inadequate for such a building as had been planned. More and yet more money had to be raised, first by new subscriptions gladly offered by a people enthusiastically devoted to a great

enterprise, and then by loans.¹⁰ Currency difficulties in the nation opened up a period of anxiety, and occasioned delay in the letting of contracts and the payment of obligations. It was a time of trial as well as of joy—as is indicated by an exceptionally interesting letter from Collyer to Edward Everett Hale, written February 27, 1868.

“I want to see Staples and have a good talk with him before I can say what I must do about the ‘*Register*,’ and when I have seen him I will write you again.

“Meanwhile I will say that if the thing *must* be done, I will do something to help, but how much I can do I do not clearly see. Perhaps you are aware that I am in a rather difficult position. I will explain it in a word, though I do not like to talk about it, but to you I can say anything because there is no film ever so thin between the beat of our hearts.

“I began here, you know, with half a score of people away out on the North Side. The North Side is still ‘remote, unfriendly, melancholy, slow,’ not to be compared to the other side ‘no account.’

“But the church grew; people came from all sides, and I said, ‘If a church has no room to grow it will

¹⁰ Fifty thousand dollars from Mrs. Greene, and \$15,000 from Artemus Carter, both “bearing interest at ten per cent per annum, and secured upon the property of the society.”—See Trustee’s Report, April 11, 1870.

104 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

grow stunted. Build a big meeting-house and you will get a big church.' And all the people said, Amen. They are building a big church, but for that reason and because where we are now is small, I have refused a big salary—take only \$3,000 a year, and of that this year have subscribed and paid in spite of their protests, for they are good as gold (may they sleep in heaven on a golden bed, as the Irish say), \$500 toward the new building. Shall do it again next year, and so keep on until Unity Church is on its feet. Meanwhile I have a big rampaging family, am a trifle extravagant as to books, and am clearing off a debt on our homestead at the rate of \$500 a year. This year it will be about free, and that will be off my mind, and a place for the auld woman and childer if I should for my sins be taken to glory.

"To do this I have to skin it. I lecture, and that is a great lift. Then I write, and that helps. I pull up by all means to about \$5,000. And so I am coming gradually at my purpose of establishing on a foundation that I trust cannot be moved another great and strong church at this vital centre of our western country . . . and providing decently for the chicks. . . .

"This is the only reason why I cannot do much beside for the denomination in outside work, that my inside extra work is so heavy. When I get some of it shifted I can do more.

"This spring I am to do what I can for two newspapers that will be started here. Have promised to

do so before yours came. . . . So you see, old fellow, that this will be not only a labour on the 'Register'—that could not fail to be welcome—but a loss, and that is another thing under present circumstances. And I have been so frank and minute that you may be satisfied, dear Hale, that I do my best. In some respects I think those that know this, as you do now, and very few more, may credit me with giving something to the cause in steadily refusing what I could get out of it by squeezing this honeycomb, or lemon, as it may happen, by putting myself in the market *sub rosa* and selling myself to the highest bidder.

"Hepworth will tell you that there is also a little trouble in the back of my head. It cannot hurt me if I am careful, and come August I shall be down to dip in the sea, but all things work together for bad if a fellow is reckless.

"Now with these few remarks, as old Dr. Hamilton said when he had preached ninety minutes by the clock to the London Missionary Society, I will proceed to the body of my discourse, which is that, when Staples comes along, we will talk it up and over, and see what is best to be done. . . . Always your brother."

It is evident from this letter, that the minister was giving his utmost to the new church. So were the people, as witness the reply of the builder, George Chambers, a member of Unity,

106 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

to the request of the committee for his bill. "There is no bill," he said, "this is my *subscription*."¹¹ Everybody in the parish was interested and making proud sacrifice to the good cause. "Timely and noble help also came from our mother church, the Church of the Messiah, freely given, and out of the kindest heart." Even outsiders, recognising the worth of the church's work or grateful to Robert Collyer for some personal or public service, gladly came and offered their gifts. But in spite of every endeavour, the money raised fell far short of the actual cost of the great enterprise. Subscriptions totalled about \$80,000; to which was added the sum of \$16,662 obtained from the sale of the old property to the North Baptist Church on October 19, 1867. The cost, however, including land, building, furnishings and organ (\$10,500), amounted in the end to no less than \$210,000. Which left a deficit of more than \$100,000!

There was deep regret in many minds that the splendid new church was not to be fully paid for at the time of its completion. Some suggested a sale of pews, but the majority refused to consent to the idea, even for so worthy an object as that of discharging a debt. The church must not abandon the control of its pews, except

¹¹ See "Some Memories," p. 178.

as a last resort. It was decided, also, not to delay the dedication, especially as the congregation had for some months been using the lecture-room in the basement of the new building for the Sunday morning services. The formal exercises, therefore, were duly announced for June 20, 1869. Elaborate preparations, made with affectionate solicitude, were marred by a single untoward event. Of little significance in itself, this event must still be recorded as a striking revelation of the theological state of mind, even among Unitarians, a half century ago, and of the liberal spirit, so noble in contrast, of Robert Collyer.

It had long been his intention to invite a Jew to take part in the dedicatory exercises of the new church, and for this rôle he had fixed upon an honoured neighbour, Rabbi B. Felsenthal. At the last moment, to Collyer's profound embarrassment and chagrin, a goodly proportion of his people entered objection to the idea. The following letter, received and answered by Dr. Felsenthal with an understanding heart, tells the story:

"Dear Sir and Brother:

"It is one of the dearest wishes of my heart that one I esteem so much should be present and take part in the dedication services of our new house for wor-

108 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ship. For a long time past I have thought of it and spoken of it to friends and they have said it would be a beautiful and good thing to do. And you of all men I have wanted to do this because while I do not personally know you I have learned to think of you as a true and good man from your letters, etc., published in our papers. Moreover, when I got the Committee of Arrangements together to talk over our services for that day this was brought up and passed. But last Saturday evening, at a meeting of a number of the general membership of the church, the matter was mentioned publicly for the first time and then to my great astonishment I found that I had a number of persons in my church who were not clear in their own minds that you ought to take part in our ceremonies and a number more who were clear that you ought not. The question turned, of course, when we came to handle it, on the old sorrow of the martyrdom of Jesus and the fact that the Jewish people still disclaim him, and deny that he was the Messiah of God. I spoke of *your* noble stand for catholicity and said that you recognised, as I believe, the greatness and glory of the Man of Nazareth as truly as any of us, and so it was that after much debate we put the matter to the vote and a majority was for your coming, but a strong minority against it. So the matter stands, and I thought it would be best to tell you the exact truth and then ask you what you thought was best to be done. I dislike very much to have you the centre of unwelcome from even a few. I think that

if this minority knew you it would change its mind, but that just now is the misfortune. This, however, this minority said, that when we get the church open and in order they would be glad—very glad—as of course all the rest would be, to have you come over and speak to us on some Sunday evening so that we may see how the matter stands.

“I will be over, therefore, to see you on Thursday at four and have a chat about it. Will you then please try to be home, or if you cannot be home leave word when you can slip over this way and see me and I will be home.

“In the true brotherhood,

“Yours,

“ROBERT COLLYER,

“Chicago, June 16, 1869.”

June 20, the day appointed for the dedication, dawned with lowering skies. Rain came early and fell heavily throughout the forenoon. The great auditorium of the new church was none the less filled to overflowing. “Never before,” says a contemporary newspaper report, “were an equal number of persons gathered in a church audience-room west of the lakes.” On all sides, embowering the pulpit and communion table, hanging from the gas-burners, and decking the organ front, were flowers placed by “the zealous offices of the ladies.” The services were

110 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

opened by an invocation by Rev. C. A. Staples. The choir and congregation joined in the singing of "Come, Thou Almighty King." The Old Testament lesson was read by Mr. Sampson of Washington, the New Testament lesson by Mr. Collyer, and the prayer of dedication offered by Dr. Hosmer, of Buffalo. The Hymn of Dedication was Collyer's own, written for the occasion at the request of his people. He "had never done such a thing," as he puts it, and was full of alarm at the prospect. But the result was triumphant, being none other than the famous "Unto Thy Temple, Lord, We Come," which has long since won its way into nearly every standard hymnal of this country and England.¹² The sermon, which followed the hymn, was preached by Henry W. Bellows, of New York.

Then came a remarkable event, carefully arranged for beforehand. Bellows, acting under instructions, concluded his sermon with a passionate and eloquent appeal for the finishing of the work thus so nobly begun. "What is needed," he asked, "to free the costliness and splendour of this temple from every reproach, ex-

¹² It is interesting to note that, as first written, and sung at this service, the opening lines of this hymn appear—

"With thankful hearts, O God, we come
To a new temple built for thee."

cept to make it a free-will offering to God and Christ? . . . Let every worshipful and grateful sentiment of which you are capable now rise and swell in your hearts, sweep away your self-saving reservations and animate you as with one voice and one heart to say, 'We will free this beautiful temple from every blemish. We will make our heart-strings into the small cord that shall drive the money-changers out of the temple. There shall be no sense of debt, no feelings of crushing mortgages hanging over this fair roof.' . . . Show the country that the liberal faith is not a matter of words only. Show the East that the West knows how to dedicate its material thrift to the God of nature and of grace. Show your minister that his heart is not more open than your hands, and let this glorious temple, now bound like a beauteous slave with a chain, and offered to God with a price, be, ere you leave these courts, set free and stand in all its loveliness disenthralled, no chain on hand or foot, a free-will offering, as a bride adorned for her husband. Then will God accept your sacrifice! Then shall this altar be holy indeed, and truth and freedom and beauty flock continually to your portals." . . .

Immediately after, Dr. Bellows's place in the pulpit was taken by Robert Collyer. His face

112 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

was shining as an angel's, and his voice spoke as a trumpet-call. This was the hour of deepest joy and gratitude that he was destined ever to know. He was to fall to depths of sorrow not yet sounded, climb to mounts of vision not yet descried, but the tide of life in terms of personal success, was now at the flood. "How old are you?" a woman asked him at a dinner-table in the late '60s. "On the sunny side of forty," he replied; "it is sunnier on this side than it was on the other." At this moment his sun was shining with the splendour of an unclouded noon-day sky. Ten years before, an untutored artisan, he had left his forge in a pleasant Pennsylvania village, and come to Chicago to take up unfamiliar mission work with those who knew him not and whom he did not know. A few months thereafter, his gift of tongues disclosed, he was preaching to a little flock in a borrowed church on the outskirts of the city, till such time as the congregation could find a real pastor properly trained for the task. Now, a decade later, he stood fair and tall in the pulpit of a temple built with the devoted hands and hearts of a great company of people—the beloved minister of the largest Unitarian church west of the Hudson River, admired and trusted citizen of the third city of the land, writer and preacher known of men

everywhere in the two countries of his birth and his adoption. Eager eyes looked with fondness on the radiance of his handsome face; eager ears strained to catch each cadence of his jubilant voice. It was now well past the noon-hour; the services had been long, but not a soul had left. On the contrary, the great congregation was being swelled by well-wishers dropping in from other churches in the neighbourhood. Collyer spoke but briefly. A few words stated the whole case. "Brethren and sisters, we must have this money!" Then began the down-pour of spiritual bounty. Five thousand dollar subscriptions—five or six of these; three thousand, two thousand, one thousand dollar offerings—a dozen of these; then the gifts of hundreds, from husbands and wives, from fathers in the name of their children, from children in memory of their parents; then smaller gifts from those who had little, but gave gladly the little that they had—widows' mites by the dozens and scores. For over an hour, Robert Collyer held his place, urging, exhorting, thanking, calling out gifts, announcing totals, his voice choked with emotion, his eyes more than once glistening with tears. And when the last pledge had been received, and the last coin dropped in the plate, it was found that the whole grand offering amounted to very

114 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

"nearly \$60,000." This was "the largest church collection of the kind ever made in the United States," if contemporary newspaper accounts are to be trusted. "It was such a day for generous deeds," said Collyer himself, a year later, "as was never known in the annals of Unitarianism, and but seldom in the history of any church of any name. It was a story that went flying through all our churches everywhere, and has brought me no small care through applications far and wide, founded on the natural induction that, if we are so good at taking care of ourselves, we ought to be good at taking care of others. The very last of these letters . . . was an application to help build a church at Dundee, in Scotland!"¹⁸

The church, thus nobly dedicated, was the largest Protestant edifice in Chicago. It was 155 feet long, 92 feet wide, and 100 feet high from the ground floor to the apex of the roof. Its audience-chamber, which occupied the whole building above the basement, seated comfortably twelve hundred people, "with capacity for two or three hundred more, by special effort." A large lecture-room, accommodating seven hun-

¹⁸ In the evening of this same day, other exercises were held, participated in by Collyer, Bellows, and Hosmer.

dred, Sunday school rooms, a ladies' parlour and a pastor's study, completed the equipment.

Architecturally the church was regarded as one of the finest of its day. The exterior, early English in style, presented an imposing porch-entrance, flanked on each side by a tall square tower surmounted by an octagonal spire. Above the porch was the largest window in the city, 22 by 44 feet, richly ornamented with gothic tracery. The material used for the walls was Athens stone, finished in rock-face work. The interior had a gallery in the front, over the vestibule, for organ and choir, and opposite in the rear a chancel, consisting of a recess extending back from the auditorium twelve feet, and a pulpit platform extending out four feet. The pews were arranged in arcs, terminating at the pulpit, and spreading back fan-shape to the entrances in the front. On each side were eight windows; and above, an open timber roof, filled with rich gothic tracery.¹⁴

One striking feature of the building was a rock, set in the wall over the main doorway, from

¹⁴ "The roof was azure, set with stars, but the stars were a mistake, and, I am real sorry to say, a sham, the only false note in the fine harmony. They were stuck in I know not how, but still remember how after some time there would here and there one get loose and come teetering down like butterflies on the congregation."—R. C., in "Some Memories," p. 180.

116 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

the spot on the hill above the city of Geneva, where Servetus had been burnt to death. The idea had been suggested by a Congregational church on the next corner, which had placed over its entrance a fragment of Plymouth Rock. Not to be out-done, and inspired after long pondering by a happy thought, Collyer wrote to a parishioner who chanced to be sojourning at the time in the city of Calvin, and asked her to beg from the authorities the gift of a stone from the sacred spot of Unitarian martyrdom. The city fathers were glad to grant the request, the stone was delved with some ceremony, and at last arrived safe and sound in Chicago. Into the portal walls it was built; and on its surface was carved the proud inscription, "Champel, 1553."

The opening of the new church brought all in the way of prosperity that Collyer had prophesied publicly, or ever dared to hope privately. Preaching a first anniversary sermon in 1870, he said among other things, "Our annual income from all services has more than doubled since we left the old church. . . . (Then) we had but one service—now we have two. At each of these services on the average we have at least twice as many people now, as we had in the old church. Our second service is very largely composed of strangers, or neighbours, and friends that I am

getting to know from their frequent coming, but not of many that come in the morning. I begged you to come to one of these evening services, for fear that nobody else would. You did not come, but they did, and I had nearly as large a congregation as in the morning. . . . I may venture to say, therefore, that I speak to nearly four times as many people as I spoke to before. Of these, there has been no large increase of Unitarians, properly speaking. We naturally get fewer of these by settlement on the North Side than any other church in the city. But the vast income of free thought, of free men and women to a city like Chicago, is the spring from which we draw continually. I am glad of this, as I never could be of a great church full of birthright Unitarians. . . . It is a great joy to me to preach to this large congregation, and to preach twice instead of once, and the result of our enterprise in this respect, I think, has been all we could possibly hope for."

An extract from the Annual Report of the Trustees, presented on April 11, 1870, fittingly completes this narrative of the new Unity. "The annual report of two years ago shows a total annual revenue from all sources of \$6,056. One year ago, there was reported from the same sources \$7,463. Our income for the past year

118 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

from the same sources has been \$16,074. . . . In reviewing the history of its success, we believe the Society will consider it eminently just and proper that we should place upon its records our testimony and belief that first among the agencies which have contributed to this great result, are the influence and example of our first and only pastor, and the beloved friend of us all, Robert Collyer."

Appended to this Report, in Collyer's handwriting, is the following:

"I want to make a note or two to this report:

"*First*—To say how sincerely grateful I feel to this outgoing Board of Trustees for the faithfulness with which its whole business has been conducted through the long term of three years, and through a period of extraordinary care and labour.

"*Second*—To Mr. George Chambers, who built the walls of our new church as carefully as though he were building a house that should stand good for many generations after he is dead and gone, and then gave the whole compensation that should come to him, amounting to \$5,000, to the church, with a generous subscription besides.

"*Third*—To my people, who have so nobly subscribed to this noble enterprise and made it their pride and joy to do so—men, women and children,

"May God bless them for all their work and labour of love.

"ROBERT COLLYER,

"Pastor of Unity Church."

The next two years, 1869 to 1871, mark the zenith of Collyer's power and influence as a preacher of religion. He was now the great pulpit figure of Chicago and the Middle West, and one of the few universally known and generally admired preachers of the country. He was at this moment in the prime of mature life, his bodily and mental vigour at its maximum, his "joy of living" unabated, his passion for truth and righteousness unexhausted, his interest in the world and its people still keen and his observation fresh; and ten years of extraordinary and uninterrupted personal success had given him an enthusiasm for his task and an authority in his speech and action which were as magnetic and spontaneous as they were potent. No disappointment had yet come to cloud the blessed sunshine of his ministry, no tragedy to weigh it down with burdens heavy and grievous to be borne. Every movement of his heavy frame, every feature of his handsome face, every tone of his mellow voice, showed the happy and successful man. He was still timid, strangely shy and embar-

passed on occasion. But zest, virility, delight, were now the predominant features of his life. He worked as easily as a bird flies, spoke his sermons as blithely as a minstrel sings his balladsongs. His step was quick and sure, his smile a burst of sunshine, the lift of his arms and shoulders as the blacksmith's at the forge. The breath of the moors was in him, the great sweep of the bending sky and the fragrance of bright heather, the tenderness of little flowers and the joy of birds, the tang of mother earth and the divine consciousness of this sweet human flesh of ours. He carried with him the atmosphere of open spaces, the unspoiled freshness of the morning, the music of winds and running streams. He knew the secret of wild laughter, had tasted the bitterness of tears, indulged the love of books and dreams and little children. The brave romance of early days, the proud achievement of self-created manhood, the genius of poetic speech, the gift of human sympathy, the pregnant mystery of personality—all these were his, and they drew men unto him as a magnet-bar steel filings. Throughout these two years, as we have seen, the great new church was well-filled, morning and evening. Regular attendants were in the majority, for his was now a large parish; but strangers were many, for "to hear Collyer" was become one

of the duties of every visitor to Chicago. Long lines of carriages displayed the affluence of not a few who sat in the pews of Unity; but long lines of simply and sometimes roughly clad wayfarers, striding off sturdily after service to all parts of the city, showed that the common people knew him for their own and heard him gladly. His was a motley throng—bankers, lawyers, railroad men, merchants, housewives, teachers, scholars, clerks, labourers—some of the best-known men of Chicago, and many of the most obscure. A veritable cross-section of the social whole, they were—united in nothing perhaps but their faith in free religion and their love of Robert Collyer.

To the stranger who came within the gates of Unity, the first impressions were wholly favourable. The new church is all brightness and cheer. The seats are comfortably filled; on occasion crowded, with people standing in the aisles. The music comes from a fine organ, and twenty or more fresh young voices in the choir.¹⁵ Conspicuous above everything else, however,

¹⁵ "Here let me thank with my whole heart the choir that we have—over twenty young men and women, devoted to this service, and forming our volunteer chorus. Continually improving in the quality of what they do, and steadfast and true to their duty, I delight to think, as I see them stand in their place, that they are our own children, devoted to our own church, singing for the love and gladness of it."—R. C., in first anniversary sermon, 1870.

from the moment that he enters and takes his place, is the preacher in the pulpit. What a figure of a man he is! Gigantic of frame, massive in breast and shoulders, thick-set, tall, straight, with long arms and huge hands—this is a giant who could still lay hammer to hot iron through a summer's day, and never weary. His head is large, crowned with an abundance of grey hair brushed carelessly about his ears, and fronted with a face of striking beauty. Smooth shaven, ruddy and clean with the complexion of vigorous health, its features are strong and of almost classic symmetry. Keen, but kindly blue eyes look out straight and true from under a high, broad forehead. A nose, sufficiently Roman to be dominant, and yet in excellent proportion, tops a large mouth, which is sensitive to every passing wave of feeling, and as handsome as though carved by sculptor's hands to lines of perfect grace. For a moment you think of Henry Ward Beecher—the resemblance is there, undoubtedly. But those deep, coarse, almost disfiguring lines in Beecher's countenance are here moulded into a soft and gentler beauty. Yet strength is in this face—sweetness, also, and light. Here are princely good-nature, sturdy courage, native common-sense, unflinching honesty. This is the face of Great-Heart in "The

Pilgrim's Progress"—hence your instant love and trust! No need, now, to wait for blessing or benediction—both have dropped upon you as you gaze upon this preacher!

With the opening of the service comes disappointment. This huge and handsome man speaks the opening prayer in somewhat stereotyped phrase, with jerky and what seems to be careless delivery. The reading of the hymn is almost shockingly bad, degenerating into a meaningless sing-song after the first line or two. The scripture reading is much better, but even here there is a painful lack of impressiveness. Collyer is no elocutionist, that is certain. Then, all through these opening exercises, there is an air of informality, almost crudeness—a sudden change in the order of service, an impromptu remark, half playful, half serious, to the congregation, a call to some officer to make a statement about parish business, or to some visitor to speak briefly on denominational or public affairs—all charming and homelike, no doubt, to those who know and thus understand, but highly disconcerting to the stranger. Inevitably the impression is conveyed that this minister does not care for form or dignity, nor appreciate the solemnities of ordered worship. And yet, as longer acquaintanceship will show, this judgment is unfair.

124 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

There is no carelessness or irreverence, no dearth of genuine feeling, in this man. There is lack of training, but not of heart; a natural, spontaneous, almost child-like independence of personality, which scorns restriction and rigid form, but never boorish indifference to beauty and decent order. He who had listened with rapture to the morning lark, drunk as one perpetually athirst the glory of the purple moors, and loved with ineffable tenderness the dear ones of his heart, had within him unfathomed deeps of emotion. So reverent was he that a single profane word would shake him till he trembled; so sensitive that a chance spray of heather would move him even to tears. His poor qualities as a reader troubled nobody more than himself; and once at least he seriously considered the advisability of taking elocution lessons. When told, after his declination of the call to the Theodore Parker congregation, that the people read newspapers and books during the opening services at Music Hall, he declared, in a fine outburst of wrath, that if he had gone there he "would have banished the novels or their readers within a year." No man was ever more solicitous for heartfelt and joyous hymn-singing in the church! Indifference or slovenliness was here intolerable to him. "When it comes to sing the hymn," he said, "and

the people sit silent, we make a mistake and suffer a great loss." Unanimous and enthusiastic participation warmed his heart. "Nothing that I have ever heard," he said on one occasion, "has so lifted me up and inspired me as this singing of ours, and once when I heard the singing at Mr. Beecher's." It is duly recorded that when preaching on a Sunday in Leeds, he was so stirred by the singing of the first hymn, that he exclaimed to the congregation, "You do not think you could do that again, do you?" Whereupon the delighted people rose with one accord and went through the hymn a second time, and he responded, "You do not think you could all just come over to New York and sing in my church once, do you? We have no such singing in America." And he himself relates how "the tears ran down (his) face," when he heard the London charity children singing in St. Paul's.

If the opening readings bring disappointment to the stranger in Unity, not so the "long prayer" which follows. Here Collyer is at his best. The native power of the man is now for the first time evident. His right hand grips the desk, his left toys with the open Bible or is lifted in just the suggestion of a gesture. The great head is thrown back, the handsome face becomes alight as though with some inner radiance of spirit.

awe, no fear, no wrestling of soul—
gratitude, and close affection! The
comes strangely silent as the prayer.
This man seems very near to God,
presence therefore very real. His words
as at first but now touched with a kind
poetry, fall like a divine touch upon the
heart; hope is quickened, faith revived,
lifted, sorrows comforted. Through
Robert Collyer knew the mystery of prayer
worked its miracle. It was to him a reality
ence, and therefore made a real experience
other men. Even at the last, when his
feeble and his voice thin, and his preaching
forever gone, he loved to take the prayer
morning service; and many there were
not to hear another's sermon, but to receive the
benediction of his spirit.

After the prayer, the sermon! and
again, in the same way, the

He has imagined, perhaps, that this clergyman of so great and wide fame is an orator of the Beecher or Phillips type. But not so! To his astonishment he finds Collyer reading his sermon, and what is more, reading it badly.

All his life as a regular preacher, Robert Collyer read his sermons from manuscript; and all his life he lamented the habit. In a lecture on "Preachers and Preaching," delivered in January, 1869, he spoke of "reality" as the one great desideratum in the pulpit, and then went on to say that he was convinced that one "element of unreality in the pulpit comes from reading sermons instead of preaching extempore. It is evident that, in the first Christian ages, what is now a sermon was just a talk about matters of the directest interest and in the directest way. This is true too about the Reformation. All the sermons then that went to the heart of the people from men like Latimer were full of the plainest possible talk, as of one plain man to another. And this did but follow the great models they

them and went prepared to be lifted and stirred by the power of his eloquence. I remember that when he entered I thought him the handsomest man that I had ever seen and when he arose to speak I sat forward on my chair prepared to be electrified. Then he spread out a manuscript and began quietly to read. Soon I sat back in my chair and knew by the first few sentences that I was to receive no sudden electric shock."—Dr. Frank Oliver Hall, in "Robert Collyer: A Memorial," page 21.

Reading a sermon, however, is not necessarily fatal to great preaching. Channing, Parker, Phillips Brooks, were all manuscript preachers. "It is possible sometimes," says Collyer, in this same lecture, "for a written sermon to be better than one preached right out of your heart and mind. There is a compactness and solidity to be attained in that way you cannot come at otherwise, and I suppose men like Dr. Chalmers and Dr. Dewey would preach better right along from manuscript than from the mind; and James Martineau could no more preach without his manuscript than a bird could fly without wings, and one sermon like those he preaches would weigh more in the solid gold of truth and genius than a hundred of the pulpit-talks of some other men." But such sermons, to be effective, must be read well, and this Robert Collyer does not seem to do! His voice is now strong, sonorous and sweet, but managed with little skill. His words are enunciated clearly, though occasionally

we were gathered, a telegram came saying the speaker would be an hour late. The manager was in despair. How could a crowd like that sit still and wait in silence for a solid hour? Then he spied Mr. Collyer, and asked him if he would not help him out. Then I, for one, was amazed at the readiness and power of this man. He climbed to the platform and spoke for an hour till Dr. Hall's arrival was announced. And his address was so fine, so entertaining, so strong, that the lecturer who came after him was a complete anti-climax."

he chokes from the sheer momentary words. His eyes vibrate rapidly between the faces of the people. Sometimes he throws his arms boldly to the far spaces of the church, and sometimes he leans over his desk, casts his eyes hither and thither, till each auditor feels himself being personally addressed. In the most intense portions of his discourse, a nobility becomes the dominant feature. His thoughts and feelings float in it," says a listener, "as music floats in a stringed instrument when it is swept by the tremulous bow of the wind. . . . All through his discourse, in his finest passages, he is swayed to and fro, and often gasps for breath. His manner and delivery all testify to the power of the presence over him. His face quivers, his hands tremble, his eyes seek the open space. What is to be said is also to be emphasised, his voice rises involuntarily his two arms are out-

his hungry and waiting hearers." In every sermon, however, there are the quieter moments. The voice becomes tender, as some appealing tale is told, some loved place or person named, some familiar poem recited. A twinkle gleams in the eye as a happy quip or amusing anecdote sends a ripple of laughter over the congregation. Over his face there sweeps a smile of surpassing warmth and beauty. And as he nears his close, there creeps into his utterance a note of intimacy, of tender longing, as if he would fold each and every soul into his heart. "There is nothing finer of its kind in American public speaking," writes one critic, "than the way in which Mr. Collyer takes his audience into his confidence toward the end of his sermon, and talks to them as if each one were his bosom friend."

There is little art in all this. Collyer's delivery lacks every element of ease and grace. His elocution is bad at a dozen different points. He is simply himself, that is all, with his faults as well as virtues plain upon him. But in Collyer's case, as in Lincoln's, it is just this thing which, proving him no perfect orator, becomes the secret of his supreme power as a speaker. Robert Collyer himself, as we have seen, describes "reality" as the *sine qua non* of preaching. And—"ecce homo!" Here is a man who is real!

182 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

His is the gift of retaining and glorifying in the manuscript preaching which he deplored, those very qualities, the desire for which led him to the endorsement of the extempore method—its directness, simplicity, fervour, “plainest possible talk as of one plain man to another”! Comparing Spurgeon’s free utterance with Martineau’s reading, he said, “The popular heart still responds to pulpit talk. Mr. Spurgeon has six thousand people to hear him, Mr. Martineau perhaps seven score, and I think the six thousand know what they are about. They do not want so much the fine gold of truth and genius as the warm, quick presence of a man, and a man who may not do so much for their thought, but still may do a great deal for their life.”

Here, as by a flash of unconscious insight, is the explanation in Collyer’s own words of his own long popularity and great fame as a preacher. People thronged to see and hear him, and rejoiced to abide in his presence, because they found “the warm, quick presence of a man,” who taught them how to live. Are the first impressions disappointing? Is his manuscript obtrusive, his elocution bad, his gestures awkward? Yes, they are all this; but how soon are they forgotten in the charm of this smiling face, this stalwart form, this downright and forthright speech!

Little by little, you find this man creeping into your heart and making it his own. You have never seen anybody just like him before. He is so natural, so spontaneous, so simple, so earnest in conviction, so tender in appeal! He makes no attempt to dazzle, shock, thrill, overwhelm. He is simply talking "as one plain man to another," telling a tale of the world he lives in, the God he worships, the human hearts he loves. And it is all so new, so fresh, so charged with homely wit and wisdom, so bright with colour, so intimate in tone! You notice the slight "burr" of the Yorkshire tongue, and you recall the romantic story of this man's birth amid the heathery moors across the seas, his years of poverty and labour, his gallant climb from the anvil to the pulpit. Then you wonder if this accounts for the lovely speech which is pouring from his lips like song-notes from a bird. Plain Saxon words, one syllabled or two, bare, unadorned, precise and clear as hammer strokes upon an anvil. No confusion as to meaning—no wandering in wildernesses of vague abstractions—no juggling with the technique of philosophy and science! The speech not of orator or scholar, but of yeomen on the moors, of children at their games, of Bunyan in his allegory, of the men who wrought the accepted version of Holy Writ! It has a flavour

184 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

of old days and wholesome places. It seems to speak of honest men and pure women, of the simplicities of children and of God. It opens the doors of homes, lights fires on waiting hearthstones, leads one to open spaces of dale and upland, is fragrant with the breath of flowers and melodious with the songs of birds. "His discourse," says a contemporary reporter, "is fragrant with flowers wild and tame, plucked from many arts and a wide range of literature. It showers you with the incense of a rare personal presence, a vocal charm, wit and anecdote in profusion." This man, surely, is acquainted with the human heart—he loves Nature and has unveiled her secrets—he walks with God, like Enoch of old time. He is a saint, a seer, a poet! That is it!—this man is a *poet*. You know it now from the lovely turn of his phrase, the delicate glow of his imagination, the rare beauty of his nature fantasies, his rich humour, his sudden and deep pathos, the whole lift and lilt of his flowing speech. He preaches, as "Bobbie" Burns sang, of sweet, familiar, homely things, the ancient earth, the ways of men, the patient seasons, love, children, the pang of death—and touches all to beauty. He does not teach us what we should know, but tells us what we should see. He helps us not to think but to feel. He makes

us laugh, cry, and be comforted again. He opens to us his own heart, with its great deeps of affection, fountains of joy, visions of beauty. And we become one with him—are made beautiful with his beauty, and in his light see light! Like every true poet he generates life, and this life becomes the life of other men.

And if this is the music of the song, what is the song itself? What is the preacher talking about this day? Perhaps public affairs, for he is interested in social problems, bold in his discussion of current topics, and more than once criticised for being "somewhat political in his utterances for the pulpit." Perhaps it is some question of theology, for he is not ashamed of the gospel of liberalism. But more likely it is some message of the heart, some simple problem of every-day human relationships. For he is as little reformer and theologian as he is orator. He is still the poet, in matter as in manner. He takes God, the soul, immortality, moral standards, all for granted—no argument, no questioning, on these great themes!—and then he tells us what they mean in the sweet ways of human living. "I have but one theme," said Collyer once, in an interview, "the Fatherhood of God. I find all religions else growing from this root, and its inter-

186 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

pretation to me is the one aim of my teaching." The man who listens to Robert Collyer, says Dr. Frank Oliver Hall, "goes away feeling that this is a good world presided over by a good God, full of kind and neighbourly people and that he himself is one of them; if he has not done as well as he ought, if he has done the things he ought not to have done, and left undone the things he ought to have done, there was yet health in him, and if the good Father will give him time and opportunity, he will prove himself worthy of his sonship. Does the preacher tell 'How Enoch walked with God'? The hearer becomes sorry that he has neglected so great salvation and determines that he too will seek henceforth the friendship of the Great Companion. Does the preacher 'Talk with Mothers'? Every woman in the sound of his voice begins to look and act like a Madonna. Is his subject 'The Lesson of an Autumn Leaf' or 'The Treasures of the Snow'? These commonplace objects become transformed and glorified by the illumination of his magic words. The subjects upon which he chooses to speak reveal the great and tender heart of the man. 'Our Debt to the Children,' 'Fathers and Sons,' 'The Joy of Harvest,' 'The Morning Song of Creation,' 'The Overplus of

Blossom'!¹⁸ What a man is this! His whole message is one of beauty and song and joy and service. . . . His whole message to humanity is compassed in one sentence, 'The greatest of these is love.' Love rings true in his words, shines in his face, mellows his voice, and exhales from his personality."¹⁹

The sermon ends; it has not been long, thirty-five minutes on the average. A strengthened, comforted, refreshed audience of men and women sing the closing hymn with a gladness which reflects the newness of life which now is theirs, and receive in grateful reverence the benediction. And the stranger leaves the church, thanking God for Robert Collyer, and resolved, when any chance may offer, to listen to his words again.

And the minister? He now goes to the Sunday school,²⁰ to remain till about half-past one

¹⁸ "Root and Flower," "What a Leaf Said," "Light on a Hidden Way," "Healing and Hurting Shadows," "Where the Light Dwelleth," "Martha and Mary," are some others.

¹⁹ See "Robert Collyer: A Memorial," page 23.

²⁰ Protestingly, however! "I cannot feel satisfied on this point—that I have no man or woman in this audience whose heart has been moved to take charge of our Sunday school, but that you let me regularly conduct services from a quarter to eleven to about half-past one, while the services in this room draw away the last ounce of strength, and I ought to be resting for the evening meeting."—R. C. in his first anniversary sermon, 1870.

138 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

in the service of the children. Then home to the Sunday dinner, and a long rest for the evening service. Collyer's house was just east of the church, built by himself and paid for painfully on the instalment plan. Here were Mrs. Collyer—a wholesome, motherly woman, not over-well, but indispensable alike to husband and minister, home and church—and five healthy children, the oldest a grown man. In a letter to Miss Baker in 1868, he writes,

“Sam is with Mears, Bates & Co. Emma is a young woman almost. Hattie writes *real* poetry. Annie hugs me every meal-time, when she gets up from the table and goes to Ogden School. Rob beats the world for mischief and beauty.”

One or two guests are more likely than not to be on hand, for Collyer was the soul of hospitality. His latch-string was always out to all comers, and many were those who pulled it. Travelling Englishmen—distinguished Americans, such as Emerson, Whittier, Thoreau, Edward Everett Hale, Lawrence Barrett—dear friends, such as Flesher Bland and his wife—curious or admiring strangers—Unitarian ministers on the wing—clergymen of other faiths seeking light, theological students requiring

counsel—all were welcome alike to bed and board. Fully three hundred days in the year, we are told, his house gave hospitality to passing friends. And what a host he was—genial, gracious, informal beyond all training of the troubled wife, an eager conversationalist, a storehouse of quaint and racy experience, a friend at once and always. Said Lawrence Barrett, “I’d rather be guest to Collyer than to the king.”

An incident characteristic of these days is narrated by Rev. Clay MacCauley. “The day after the Presbytery had withdrawn my license to preach,” he writes,²¹ “feeling utterly lonely and friendless in the big city, I decided to have a talk with Robert Collyer. . . . I knew that he had heard of me, and I felt confident that he would welcome me, and possibly help to make things easier than they were. I shall never forget the reception Robert Collyer gave me. In answer to my summons he came to the door. When I told him my name, at once he took both my hands in his, and looking hard at me exclaimed, ‘My poor boy, and what have they been doin’ to ye? Come in! I know what ye want: it’s some beer and a piece of roast beef!’ Leading me into a room, and pushing me down upon a lounge, he said, ‘Mother, bring us some beer.’ He then

²¹ “In His Memories and Memorials,” page 105.

140 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

took place beside me, and began a cheery affectionate talk. From that moment I knew I had found a big-hearted friend, to whom I could go for counsel, whatever might befall."

Dr. Edward A. Horton tells a similar tale. "I was advised," he says,²² "to consult Collyer as to studying for the ministry, and armed with a letter of introduction, I entered his study at Chicago. A stranger to him, Collyer naturally held me at arm's length, and quietly observed my speech and manner. He drew me out. He offered me obstacles. He sounded my central motives. Finally, for some good reasons, he thawed, and became a genial spring-time of encouragement. As a climax to the visit, he went to his books (lining the walls of his study) and took from the shelf two volumes of Tennyson, and gave them to me, with the injunction, 'Get Tennyson into your blood!'"

Visitors, while always welcome, were made to fit into the day's routine, which seldom varied. Collyer was up early, as he was usually early to bed. There was a happy breakfast, a frolic with the youngsters, then the plunge into the shelf-lined and disordered study for letters, writing, converse with beloved books. From 1867 on, a cigar was his companion in these secluded

²² In letter to the *Boston Transcript*.

hours. The sermon was not begun till Thursday morning—then he wrote rapidly, almost feverishly, with few corrections, throwing each sheet of paper to the floor, until the place was littered from end to end. If he tired in the midst of composition, it was not unusual for him to drop upon a lounge, fall asleep to order à la Napoleon, and, twenty minutes later, rise up fresh for continued work. If the sermon was delayed, or would not come, and Saturday dawned with it unfinished, he fell prey to nervousness and irritability. No man more human than he! Very earnest, and yet tender, was the plea of the eldest sister one day, when father and daughter were sitting together, "Papa, I wish you would write your sermons on Monday and Tuesday, you are so cross on Saturdays when you are busy and we make a noise."²³ The afternoon was filled with parish calls or public business; the evening free for such engagements as might come along. Lecturing was the one consistent outside intruder upon his time, and the chief source of interruption to his regular church work.

A fitting crown to the labours and triumphs of these years is announced in Collyer's letter to Flesher Bland, on December 28, 1869.

²³ See this whole delightful story as told by Collyer himself in his "Some Memories," p. 190.

142 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

"I have been invited to preach the annual sermon before the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in London next Whitsuntide. . . . But I cannot be spared from my church, and shall have to decline. I am very proud of the honour though, and shall ask to have the privilege whenever I can spare the time, which I hope will be when you can go also."

The formal declination was conveyed in the following letter to Rev. Robert Spears, Secretary of the Association (December 29):

"Your letter bearing the invitation to preach the sermon before your Association next Whitsuntide has come duly to hand. I thank you and the brethren through you most heartily for this mark of your esteem, and if it were in any wise possible for me to be in England at that time I should be entirely at your service. But I have had within no long time to abandon the idea of visiting the old mother and old mother-land in 1870. This new church needs my close and steady attention. Yet awhile it cannot be left, I find, for any length of time without damage greater than we care to risk. New people are coming in right along. All sorts of things need to be done by the minister that may be safely delegated by and by. So I shall have to put off my visit, so will the wife, and look forward to the good time coming when I can be better spared. I devoutly hope and believe that will be in 1871, and if it be so, of course I shall

let you know, just as I shall let my own kinsfolk know. And I venture to beg that, if there be no imperative reason preventing, I may be thought of as one who will be proud and glad to preach the sermon whenever I can come, and to do any other service in my power then and always for our faith and order. Most faithfully yours."

The invitation was renewed the next year, and accepted. Therefore on a certain day of April, 1871, did Robert Collyer and his wife, with little Annie, whose health had failed and who needed a change of climate more than doctors, set sail for Liverpool. On arrival, they went straight to Leeds, to see the dear old mother; and, as happy chance would have it, reached her on the twenty-first anniversary of their original departure for America. "Our wedding journey had taken in twenty-one years."²⁴ This was followed by the inevitable trip to Ilkley and environs, with happy visits to old friends and kinsmen. Only after these pious pilgrimages had been duly made, did the travellers set their faces toward London.

The sermon before the British and Foreign Unitarian Association was the first and chief duty of the hour. It was delivered in the Essex

²⁴ See "Some Memories," p. 194.

144 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Street Chapel, built years before for the ministry of Theophilus Lindsey and the first in the city to bear the Unitarian name. Through all his life the memory of this visit remained one of the most precious possessions of Collyer's heart. He was deeply moved, as he faced this distinguished Unitarian audience in the beloved mother-land, and he spoke as one "in the spirit." "I had not to lift," he says, "but was lifted, the light shone clear for me, and it was as the budding of wings."²⁵ Those who heard knew this as well as he who preached; and "how they spoke to me after the service and clasped my hand" was not the least wonderful part of the after-memory.

Then came happy days and weeks in London, as the guest mainly of Robert and Mrs. Spears. He visited James Martineau for the first time; held converse with Sir John Bowring,²⁶ then a venerable and saintly man of seventy-nine years; sat in Thackeray's chair at the Reform Club, with Sir John Robinson, editor of the *Daily News*. He met Sir James Lawrence and his brothers, and thus began that fine friendship with the Lawrence family which was ended only with his death. Sir James had been Lord Mayor of

²⁵ See "Some Memories," p. 203.

²⁶ Author of "In the Cross of Christ I Glory," "Watchman, Tell Us of the Night," and other well-known hymns.

London the previous year, and was just the man to show him out-of-the-way places in the ancient city. So they went together to the old guild halls, examined the gold plates and flagons at the great Guild Hall, looked into Holloway Prison and the hideous old structure of Newgate. One notable afternoon was spent in the warden's pew in old St. Paul's, at the annual service for the children of the London charities, when ten thousand boys and girls sang to the great congregation. Sundays brought preaching engagements, gladly proffered and gladly accepted. Dr. Martineau's chapel in London, Mr. Gaskell's in Manchester, Charles Beard's in Liverpool, were some of the places best remembered. And of course Leeds, where old friends and curious strangers gathered in vast numbers!

A short journey on the continent completed the summer's outing. The mountains were here again the great attraction. From Antwerp down the Rhineland to Switzerland Collyer went, to spend glorious days by the lakes and on the craggy summits. "On three July days," he writes, "I went clean up into the snow to what is called the Furcan Pass, and the glacier of the Rhone—a wonderful tramp. . . . We reached the snow on the second day and went tramping over it scant of breath, for the air up there grows

146 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

very thin. Here and there we would come to a little bare patch where the grass had sprung, and then close to the snow we would find flowers of the most wonderful tender beauty I ever saw, looking as if they had won their blessed light by battles with their hard fortune, and by seizing bravely every moment of sunshine and turning it to holiest account; and then I said in my heart, 'O God, why cannot I take this sight to my heart forever, and learn what worth may lie in the hardest fortunes, if I am faithful to the gleams of thy grace.' . . ." Geneva was the portal by which they left Switzerland; and a few days were spent in Paris, where they saw the sad wreckage of the siege and the Commune days.

The steamship *Batavia* brought the party home in early September—"father, mother, and the little maid, purely well." On the third Sunday of the month, minister and people gathered together in Unity for a glad service of reunion. A great throng filled the church. On the communion-table stood a model of the *Batavia*, studded with tube-roses. Jubilant voices in pulpit and pews lifted loud and clear the words of the great dedication hymn—

"Unto thy temple, Lord, we come
With thankful hearts to worship thee;

And pray that this may be our home
Until we touch eternity."

Never to any church did the future offer a fairer
prospect; never to any did it hold a more dread-
ful fate!

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRE—AND AFTER

1871-1879

“ . . . the great conflagration, when the church and the homes were destroyed, to be rebuilt again and established.”—R. C. in “Some Memories,” page 117.

ON the evening of Sunday, October 8, 1871, at the regular service at Unity Church, Robert Collyer delivered a lecture on the Commune in Paris. He recited the history of that sad carnival of blood and fire, described the waste of the city as he had seen it on his visit in the summer, and pictured in graphic phrase the desolation of the people. As the congregation left the church, their minds full of the terrible facts of which the preacher had told them, their eyes were attracted by a glare of light in the dark heavens to the southeast. “I was one,” writes a contemporary, “that from out that dispersing audience saw that light, and well remember how anxiously many debated as to what it might forebode.”

This was the beginning of the great fire which was in a few hours to devour the city. Collyer saw the ominous reflection of the blaze on the South Side as he walked from the church to his home. It made him anxious, even alarmed, for the summer had been the dryest on record, great fires were sweeping the parched forests to the northward, and Chicago, with its wooden buildings and wood-paved streets, was like a tinder-box. But he was tired, for the day had been hot and his labours many, and he went to bed. About midnight he was awakened by Mrs. Collyer, who told him that the fire was burning fiercely and threatening to cross the river. One look into the night revealed a terrifying spectacle—all the sky to the south and west a mass of flame, burning embers borne high on a strong wind like the myriad flakes of a snowstorm, the first refugees moving hurriedly through the streets. But Collyer, though deeply worried, still hoped that the conflagration could be brought under control and thus confined to the South Side. He even took his children over the bridge, crossing the Chicago River, to see the fiery spectacle a little nearer. But there was a speedy retreat, for the wind was rising to a hurricane, volumes of flame were leaping around and above the huge warehouses along the river-front, and the bridge was

150 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

seen to be doomed to immediate destruction.

It was now early morning, and the fight to save the North Side of the city was lost. Collyer decided to abandon his house in favour of the church, the thick stone walls and slate roof of which might possibly survive even this fiery ordeal. It was a forlorn hope, of course, but all members of the family took hold with a will to move whatever could be carried in their arms.¹ The books were an especial care, for each one was a beloved friend, with a history and a meaning, and therefore not lightly to be abandoned. Some were taken to the church; others, including the most precious, were loaded into an express wagon and transported to a house which then seemed well out of the path of the flames, but where they were destroyed within an hour; some, of course, had to be left behind, and were never seen again. As it happened, however, a pile of volumes thrown into a park opposite the church were spared, the flames sweeping over them as by miracle. These Collyer kept tenderly in after years

¹ Even nine-year-old Rob clamoured for his share of the salvage. "I remember well how we hung a picture we would save, a landscape, by William Hart. We looped it over his neck, and away he went. But the loop was long, the picture hung before him and bumped on his small shins, whereat he wept a few quiet tears; but he got there, for he takes after his mother."—R. C. in "Some Memories," page 222.

in their charred bindings.² The work of rescue went steadily on, until the front of the house was actually ablaze. Even then Collyer lingered, as though he could not tear himself away. "You don't know," he said, in a speech ³ recounting his experience, "how dear your home is 'way down in your heart till you see it burning before you. When I saw that going, I didn't know as I should ever get over it."

After the house came the church! By the late forenoon it was seen that this must go too, for the fire was still sweeping on with unabated fury. But a gallant fight was made for it, all the same. "We fought the fire fairly as it came on us from below, and beat the infernal beast so that it could never have burnt us up, but then found that it had set its fiery teeth away up on the roof out of our reach, and I knew that all was over. I crept upstairs alone to my pulpit, where I had stood the night before and spoken to nearly a thousand men and women. I took one long last look at it, the church and the dear, sweet, noble organ, then I took the Bible as it lay where I had left it, got out at last and locked the door,

² "I will never have these old friends rebound. I wish them to fall to the children in their old scorched clothes. Their theology repelled fire well."—R. C. in an interview (1878).

³ In Boston, November 14, 1871.

152 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

put the key in my pocket, and went away. By that time the roof was ablaze, and I thought my heart was broken." ⁴

With both home and church gone, there was nothing to do but flee. So burying their silver "in a celery patch not far away," and seizing upon whatever was most precious or could be most easily transported, they "started on (their) pilgrimage from the City of Destruction." Five times that dreadful day they moved, and settled down, and moved again, each time losing, or leaving behind, somewhat of the little they were carrying. Already, before leaving the church, Collyer was blind from the smoke and glare, and palsied from the fatigue of the battle. He could not open either eyes or hands. Helpless, therefore, he was led from place to place, until brought at last to the home of a parishioner, Mrs. Price, which seemed to be safe beyond all doubting. Here his eyes were bathed until they opened, and his arms and limbs rested until strong again. But even here the fire followed unrelenting, and the pilgrims had once again to renew their march. At last, like a messenger from heaven, came a Mr. Moulding, who had hitched up horse and wagon to find his minister and family, and bring them to his home in the far northwest of the

⁴ From a letter to *The Liberal Christian*.

city, safe "in the lee of a small lake." How he found them, nobody remembered. But here he was—and the mother and children piled gratefully into the wagon, while the father remained behind, to lend aid and comfort wherever possible. By nightfall he also reached the refuge by the lake. And there in the grim darkness he stood, with a chair over his head as a protection from the shower of sparks and burning wood, and watched the last house burn and slowly tumble into ashes.⁵

When all was over, the weary children tucked away in bed, and Collyer and his wife alone together, the brave man broke down "for the pity of it and the pain." The glorious new church, the house he owned, the books he loved, the parish he had builded—all were gone. And as if this were not enough, there was the awful fear that many of the dear friends might have been caught in the flames by the sudden explosions which had cut off escape by the avenues northward. It was more than body and spirit, worn by the labours, excitements and terrors of the day, could seem to bear, and he gave way, like "Rachel mourning for her children and would not be comforted." The comforter was here in this case, however, in the person of Mrs. Collyer, who re-

⁵ For other details, see "Some Memories," pages 218-227,

154 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

fused to lose hope or be afraid. "Sorrow may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning." This was the burden of her message, spoken again and again in quiet words that night, till strength at last crept slowly back into the shaken soul. He began to look up once more—to hope, and be of good courage; and in the morning he "was ready with her help and the help of God, to face the grim day and the instant demand."⁶

The sight which met Collyer's eyes on the next morning was one which might well have broken him down a second time. All the North Side and most of the South Side were in ashes. The burnt district comprised an area of about three and a half square miles, containing twenty-two hundred acres—about one-sixth of the city tract. This district, furthermore, included the best portions of the town, the property destroyed aggregating twice the value of all that remained. In Collyer's own neighbourhood practically nothing was left but blackened walls and piles of smoking debris. Standing by the ruins of Unity Church, he could look for a mile and three-quarters south, a mile and a half north, and three-quarters of a mile west, and see not one house or building, save only Mahlon Ogden's home, Lind's

⁶ See "Some Memories," pages 228-229.

block, and the First National Bank. Ninety-eight thousand men, women and children were homeless; and of these more than seventy thousand crouched and shivered out of doors in the chill October air.

Relief was the instant business of the hour. Mayor Mason and other officials acted with promptitude and efficiency. The Chicago Relief Association, an old and well-tried organisation, was made the central bureau for the receipt and disbursement of all money and supplies. The city was divided into districts, a superintendent and co-operative committee appointed for each, and an elaborate system of registration established. Collyer was at once appointed superintendent of his district, and was soon hard at work on the prodigious task of bringing help to the thousands thus placed within his care. He was a poor hand, however, at fitting into the rigid system of relief established by the authorities. He wanted to help, not investigate and keep records; and in a short time reorganisation was necessary in his office. But he faltered not at all. Through long weeks he toiled as he had not done since the days of the Civil War, for the woes of the stricken city were on his heart.

From the beginning, after his temporary breakdown, Collyer seems to have resolved to meet a

156 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

situation which appeared at the moment hopeless, as though nothing had happened—to lament no past, fear no future, but live whole-heartedly in the present; to take up life, so far as possible, exactly where it had been dropped on the night of the holocaust, and push bravely on. A little family incident is typical of his attitude.

It chanced that the eldest son, Samuel, was to have been married on the following Tuesday, or Wednesday, evening. The fire, of course, interrupted all preparations—there was no church for the ceremony, no guests for the party, even the affianced bride was lost. But Collyer would not hear of a postponement—the wedding must come off on the day appointed! So the city clerk was found, and a license roughly drawn up on a stray sheet of paper, happily procured. Such friends as could be found, or had the heart to come, were properly assembled. And the two were wed! But the feast!—where were the cakes and ale to be found? One must forage in such a wilderness. Out therefore went the father to seek some luxury to grace the table; and it was found in the shape of a string of sausages hanging in the window of a butcher shop. A few pennies, all the money he had, would buy a pound of them—would the women be so good as to cut off the rest? “Isn’t this Robert Collyer?” she asked.

"Yes," replied the customer. Then, recalling a poor family on Market Street, which had been graciously helped in an hour of need, she said, "You have forgotten, sir, but I have not. Take them all, and welcome!" So the whole string crowned the marriage feast! ⁷

A more memorable event was that of the religious service held on the site of Unity on the following Sunday morning. Collyer was worried about his flock—they were scattered far and wide, and he wanted to find and succour them. Furthermore the dear church, if it was ever to rise from its ashes, must begin now. There must be no doubts, no haltings, no lost moment. So on the Saturday evening after the fire, there appeared in the newspapers the announcement that on the next day "Robert Collyer would preach after the fashion of the Covenanters, among the ruins of his own church."

Accordingly, at a little before noon, the people gathered in the warm and pleasant sunshine in front of the gutted walls of their former house of worship, which stood up grand and terrible amid the surrounding waste of desolation. Shattered stones and beams were all about; a thin vapour of smoke was curling up where the old pulpit had stood; the overturned and broken capi-

⁷ See also "Some Memories," pages 229-231.

158 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

tal of a Doric column, lying before the church door, served the preacher for a platform. Crowded around him were the congregation, on foot and in carriages, many of them friends and parishioners, a goodly number strangers. The service began with the singing of the hymn,

“Before Jehovah’s awful throne
Ye nations bow with sacred joy.
Know that the Lord is God alone;
He can create, and he destroy.”

The Scripture passage for the morning was the sixty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, “Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste.” The minister had to stop as he read these words; but he pulled himself together, and finished. The lesson was followed by the hymn, “deaconed out” two lines at a time by Mr. Collyer:

“Awake our souls, away our fears,
Let every trembling thought be gone.”

Then came the prayer, simple, child-like, as always, but rising to great heights of dignity and feeling. “At first the congregation was like an assemblage of mourners,” writes one who was

present. "Their faces wore that expression of unspeakable sorrow with which men met each other when the news of the assassination of Lincoln swept over the country. They were almost in tears. But as the words fell from the preacher's lips, they brightened up." One more hymn, Sir Walter Scott's "When Israel of the Lord beloved," led to the sermon.

This was not so much a sermon, as an informal talk of minister to people. He spoke "the words that were in (his) heart for consolation and courage"—and for admonition, too! Referring to the cry of some distracted persons that the fire was a divine judgment upon a wicked city, he said, "I have heard not a little speculation about the moral significance of our great calamity, and men who meant better have unwittingly accused God of a great wickedness when they have intimated that it was a judgment of heaven, because of the ungodliness of the city. First of all, judgments of heaven are not retrospective but prospective, that is, they are never of the backward glance, but always of the forward. No such punishment could possibly do any good if it were only received as a wilful reflection of the rod of heaven. Secondly, there was no reason why Chicago should have been made an example for the rest of the world. Of course, we were a people of

160 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

worldliness and selfishness, of boasting and parade, but certainly no city in the Christian world has ever done more, according to its means, for schools, churches and charities."

The scourge, however, was laid on where it was deserved. "We have been strikingly shortsighted," said the preacher, "in the boundaries of our fire limits, in permitting so many, or any, wooden buildings within the limits of the city. We have given full sway to drinking, gambling and licentious houses, and have by our moral laxity invited to the city and harboured in it, a criminal population almost equal to that of London. We have done less to reform this population than almost any other city. We have drifted, too, into the hands of a set of tricky politicians. And the only recognised aristocracy of the city is a set of ignorant and recently enriched social swells and snobs."

Then came the gentler, braver words. "What is lost? First, our homes. Second, our business. These are temporary. Third, our money. This is a great misfortune, but one which we can repair. We have not lost, first, our geography. Nature called the lakes, the forests, the prairies together in convention long before we were born, and they decided that on this spot a great city would be built. Second, we have not lost our

men, noble, generous, and of genius. Third, we have not lost our hope. The city is to be at once rebuilt, and the glory of the latter house shall be greater than that of the former."

At the close, he spoke of himself and his parish, and said: "For two or three days after the catastrophe I was stunned; at first I felt as if I had somehow or other got personally injured in the fight with the flames. But after two or three days, I began to wonder what I should say to you when we should come together this morning, and it has all come to me in one word, that the fire makes no difference to me. If you'll stay here, I will, and we'll work together and help each other out of our troubles. As for me, while I was thinking it over, one thought came to me which was so grotesque that you'll smile when I tell it to you. I said to myself, 'Well, old fellow, you are safe enough. You can make as good hammers and nails as any man in Chicago'—and I can, too! I worked at that business before I went to preaching. And then, if you'll turn in and work bravely, we'll come together every Sunday, and I'll say something that I hope will have some influence; and we'll come out of it at last and rise above this trouble. I don't mean to desert you and the church; I mean to stick by you, and I want you to stick by me. People have come

nand to mouth, if need be. Some had come during the past week, and asked, Collyer, what do you think of it now? I told them that I thought that the Americans were the greatest of all the nations ever made, and I do, for right in this all this mourning over your own losses helped me and helped one another, and the great Union has come to the relief of

“We’ll find, in the end, that we’ve done the right thing in holding by one another. We find that we all have this glorious, libertarian faith that has held us up all through this, and has not failed us in the darkest moments of our lives.”

Right heartily, and with smiling faces the congregation sang together the closing Doxology, “From all that dwell below the firmament
Then rose up William Clarke, brother Freeman Clarke, of Boston, to offer a prayer that the organisation of Unity be made that a new church be built.”

the encouragement he had given them and his promise to remain. This was passed "with something like a shout of gladness," the people crowded forward to press the minister's hand, and the first service of the new Unity Church was over!⁸

Collyer's sole purpose in calling together his people on this day was, as he put it, to get them "to do what (they) had done." But he had builded better than he knew. For the story of this service went far and wide over the country, it was flashed to England and the Continent, pictures of the scene were published in newspapers and weekly journals.⁹ Wherever people heard of the Chicago fire, they heard of Robert Collyer and his service on the ruins of his church; and they thanked God and took courage. For the words of this valiant man showed that the stricken city was unafraid, that it was to endure, that it was to rise from its desolation stronger and more beautiful than before. And everywhere men rushed to help, that the spirit might not falter or the flesh grow weak. This Sunday morning must be taken as marking the climax of Collyer's life—it was the supreme moment of his career.

⁸ See also "Some Memories," pages 232-236.

⁹ See especially *Harper's Weekly* (November 4, 1871), page 1025.

164 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Rising above the ashes of his own life, he lifted with him the city, and the nation! Speaking for himself and for his own people, he spoke for Chicago, for America, for humanity in its moments of deepest agony. His voice became for this one instant a universal cry of hope. His figure stood, in this one place, an eternal symbol of man's unconquerable spirit. When all else is forgotten, this hour upon the Chicago ruins will be remembered.

Collyer's achievement on this great day was at bottom a triumph of self-mastery. But there was in it also, unquestionably, a reflection of the tide of good which had come pouring in upon him from the first morning after the disaster. Beginning as a bountiful stream, it became a flood within a fortnight. First came Charles W. Wendte, minister of the Third Church, four miles away on the South Side, to take the whole Collyer family to his home, where they were welcomed and kept through several weeks. On the morning after the wedding-feast came Deacon Mears, who finding his minister without a penny, promptly emptied his pockets one by one into Collyer's grateful hands. Then came the help from the outer world. Innumerable consignments of food, clothing and funds for the sufferers, sent in Collyer's care and all turned over

to the Relief Association; and to himself, from friends known and unknown, near and far, words of sympathy and cheer, offers of help, gifts of money! "Five hundred pounds for your family," from Sir James Lawrence in England; fifty dollars "as a personal gift to Robert Collyer," from Mrs. S. E. Wetherell of Boston; one hundred and fifty dollars from Harper and Brothers "at the request of Mr. M. D. Conway"; three hundred dollars "for yourself and family," from Richard Warren of New York; five thousand dollars from William Gray of Boston, "for your own personal expenses instead of a salary from Unity Church during 1872"; one dollar from a Catholic working-girl who "wanted to help"—these are a few of the gifts, the records of which have survived the years. Mrs. James T. Fields writes "to say that we are reserving a few pleasant little things for your house when you are once more established, as you must be before many months, which may recall perhaps the old library and old friends. I have put aside a bound Mss. of Mr. Emerson and one of Dr. Holmes, and we have a portrait of Hawthorne, and one or two other things of that nature to make the place look home-y." Dr. William G. Eliot offers \$200 for a sermon "next Sunday," and adds "your presence and statement will lead to a good deal

166 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

more." The Trustees of the Church of the Messiah, St. Louis, resolve that, "inasmuch as (their) church has by the resignation of its pastor been left destitute of pastoral care and pulpit ministrations, (they) request the Rev. Robert Collyer to assume the pulpit duties of this church until his church edifice in Chicago is rebuilt, and that they assume the payment of his salary as long as he may thus minister to this church, without, however, interrupting his pastoral relations or care for his church and congregation in Chicago." Invitations arrived from New York, Boston and elsewhere, to come and tell the story of the fire, with promises of generous contributions. A letter to Flesher Bland (October 30) tells the tale:

"We are all safe out of the fire, thank God! with no great harm of any sort. . . . You are not to think of us as in any wise destitute; great tides of sympathy have set in toward us such as I could never have dreamed of. Our Association in the East has voted me three thousand dollars for salary.¹⁰ Our churches in London telegraph me that they have mailed five hundred pounds for my personal use. One church at the East sent me a thousand dollars, and another eleven hundred and thirty, strictly for the same purpose, beside which I have had many hundreds

¹⁰ Later withdrawn in favour of Mr. Gray's gift.

more, the sum of which I have not counted. Many thousands have been sent me for personal distribution among those who cannot beg. Thirty-one hundred dollars came by the evening mail for the purpose. . . . I am very busy. I preach every Sunday; shall stick to Chicago, sink or swim, but have no fear at all of sinking. We keep our hearts up and our heads up. . . .”

Three gifts were especially memorable. The first was a gift of sixteen dollars from the news-boys, bootblacks and other homeless lads at the Rivington Street Lodging House in New York. In acknowledgment, Robert Collyer wrote the following letter:

“My dear Fellows:

“Your great friend and mine, Mr. Williams, has sent me a letter from Mr. Calder, with one from himself, and the sixteen dollars you gave to help Chicago through this hard pinch. I write this to thank you for what you have done right out of my heart; to tell you I think your subscription is one of the grandest that was ever made for anything, because you must have so very little to spare, and whenever you get into a tight place this winter I want you to feel that you have helped some poor fellow out of a tighter.

“Now I must tell you what I mean to do with this money. I mean to keep it all to myself; and when-

168 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ever, as long as it lasts, I see any boy or girl I think needs a dollar I will take one of yours to give them. I hope I shall make no mistakes, and give it to the right sort—just to those who need it, and not to those who are shamming. I should hate to be taken in, but if I am I want you all to try and remember if you have ever taken any fellow in, and if you have, you must consider my mistake as your punishment, and never do it again.

“And so, boys, God bless you for your kind hearts, and the way you put your hands deep down into your pockets.

“I am always yours,”

The second gift came in the form of a letter from Cornell University, offering a thousand dollars for a horseshoe! Collyer had not made one for twenty-one years, when he last stood at the forge of the Ilkley smithy. But the thousand dollars was a handsome sum, and the horseshoe was a challenge! Off, therefore, went the minister of Unity to an old friend, a blacksmith in the neighbourhood who had set up his shop anew after the fire, showed him the letter, and asked the loan of anvil and helper. This was granted with huge glee—and the horseshoe was made, stamped with the name of its clerical maker, wrapped with an affidavit duly signed and sealed, and sent to the college hill at Ithaca. And back

came one thousand dollars, with fifty to boot; and later on, other contributions to a grand total of \$2,250.75.

The last gift was from Sir Edwin Lawrence, brother of Sir James, of London, and consisted of a library in duplication, so far as was possible, of the books, especially a notable collection of volumes "all about our home county of York," which had been lost in the flames. Many volumes were rare, and difficult therefore to bring together. But they were all found at last, and sent to Chicago in January, 1874. Their arrival brought the following letter to the donor:¹¹

"Ever since that great case of books came to make me weep for joy, I have wanted to write and thank you for your most noble gift. For I understand through Mr. Spears that I was most indebted to you not only for the special gift of the rarest and best, but for the whole generous thought. Such poor words as I can say in the way of thanks seem to me very bald and bare, but I want you to believe that I feel what I cannot quite say.

"Every time I enter my study their noble presence greets me, and every time I have a handful of minutes to spare I take one down, dive into its pages, and thank you over again for your good gift. These volumes make me very rich in the one way I care to

¹¹ Dated February 11; quoted in part only.

170 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

be rich, or ever shall be, and they carry me over tide and time and put me in communication with a world which but for them would be as good as closed to my longings. For you will guess that ever since the fire my means have gone very nearly to build up the waste places our disaster made for the wife and for others. It has been a tough job, but we have pulled through with the generous aid of our English and American friends."

Some letters of this period tell their own story of outward events and inward reactions.

To Miss Alice Baker, October 27, 1871,

"Every day my sorrow grows lighter as one by one the letters come that I in a measure expect and yet that fill me with a pure and good surprise. So yours came the day before yesterday, as full of blessing as your heart is and the heart of dear Susan Lane, who joins you in it. I had felt sure I should hear from you whenever you could get a letter through the thick alarm and commotion, but I did not know the measure of your warm and noble hearts after all, and how they would beat so steadily to ours here in our appalling sorrow. Only one thing I do not feel to be right for you to do, to send me this money out of your own very pockets. I know what it must be to you, dear friends. John M. Forbes would not feel a million as you will feel this; and if I tell you first that we are in no need at all, and second, that you will lift a real

load off my mind and make my winter's work easier to me if you will let me remit back again this much you have taken out of your own living, you will let me do it, won't you? Say so in an early letter. If you don't, I swear by Jupiter and Thor that I will buy something with this money so ugly and useless that it will be a perpetual misery to see it—presentation books of plates out of Godey and 'sitch.' I will inscribe them to you with undying esteem and blight the rest of your lives.

"Tell those dear, good children in your school that I thank them sincerely for their good gift. . . . O, Alice, and Sue, it was hard for a day or two. I really did not care so very much about the loss of property, but to see so many dear, sweet things burnt up, into which we had put so much love, hosts of things which had come through many years to be so sacred, I thought indeed my heart was broken. And so it is, but not, thank God, past mending, and you are all helping to mend it. We are with Mr. Wendte and his mother. . . . We go to-day to board near Sam and his wife, perhaps for the winter. Think of our boarding! I tell mother that in the spring she will be four feet six tall and six feet four round."

To "Dear Brother Bland," December 30, 1871,

". . . We had a nice Christmas. Our friends at the East remembered the children; they were never

172 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

so rich before. And they remembered a great many more children beside ours, for through our Christian Union about 8,000 handsome Christmas presents have come to the children of the city from Boston and New England, and have been given mainly through the Sunday schools, without the least reference to the denomination. . . . All these toys, books, etc., came from our people, but you know our people believe in children as Jesus did. They never did a nobler thing than to send these Christmas gifts.

"I saved a good many books, and what I lost Sir Edwin Lawrence of London offers to duplicate. Also the Unitarians of London offered to do the same, and begged to do it, but as they were mostly bits of luxury except the encyclopedia, books about Yorkshire, and so on, I did not like to let them do it after they had done so much in other ways, and I declined. This Christmas, however, friends have sent books from New York and Providence, 203 volumes, all of the best kinds, and advise me that they have \$200 to spend as I shall direct on other works, so I am likely to have as many books as I can handle. I have two sets of Dickens from different quarters. I miss my Britannica, but Appleton sent me his American cyclopedia, and I shall get along with that very well. . . . I preach three times each Sunday at points about five miles apart, and have very good times."

To Jasper Douthit, January 11, 1872,

"The turkey was as big as a small donkey, and as tender as your heart. The fried chicken made me feel that they must have some such dish in a better world, and the butter might have been of the sort mentioned in the passage, 'Butter and honey shall he eat.' And the nuts *were* nuts. 'Thank all the folks, including the good wife. . . .'"

To Flesher Bland, May 23, 1872,

"It was ever so good to find your letter waiting for me when I got home from a long journey to the East where I have been getting money for the rebuilding of Unity Church. . . . I am glad to hear of your good estate. I think it must be with you as it used to be with your uncle when he came past our shop from market; if he had a good day, he always carried his whip well up. I should like to see how you carry yours; it must be well up, too.

". . . Do go, by all means, home. I will add twenty pounds to the thirty if you need it, and nobody shall be the wiser, not even our wives. You must go. You will have such an ovation as never was had in Wharfedale in our life-time, and you deserve it. It is not impossible that I may slip over if my mother lives so long; just spend my two months' vacation on sea and land, and if it be so I shall be mighty glad to see you on the dear old spot, and share by a reflected light in your joy, and hear your best sermon. . . . My insurance turned out all right. I had a thousand

174 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

due me on salary, which they insist on paying, and about seven thousand sent me for my personal use. Have made about \$2,000 lecturing between whiles this winter, and so we are forehanded, you see, thank God and his children. We are pretty well. Annie, Emma, Rob, self and mother very well, but Hattie is under the doctor's care. Has a cough and is generally run down; I think with hard study. . . . I am beginning to get hold of my work again. Preached Sunday week from 'Whatsoever a man soweth,' etc., and last Sunday from 'Thou shalt build according to the pattern that was shown thee in the mount,' and on Sunday I shall have 'Let your light shine.' . . .

"I had a fine letter the other day from Bradley—all jogs on there as per sample when you used to preach. I think Rebecca Batty looks just about as she did when you used to drink tea there. . . . Margaret Parratt drifts on to grey hairs. Poor Mary—will sell her gown for rum. Had been off with a low bad man some time, and came back ragged and lost. . . . They have sold the grand old woods on the Middleton estate. . . . John Dobson is the same old sixpence, only more so. . . . Addingham exactly the same. Yours indeed"

To Miss Alice Baker, November 18, 1872,

"I called in to see you about the blessed old talk and meetin' and oysters and 'sitch,' and told Sue it would be the very pleasantest thing that ever was,

except that I hadn't the lecture you spoke of. It went up! Neither had I another to put in its place, but would try to think of something. Now as I look over the barrel I see nothing but the 'Burns' which can be used, except to give me a great deal of trouble. That will be no trouble, and I wish you could beguile those sistern into taking it. . . .

"And see here now, sister mine, never you write an apology to me again, or you will catch it. You have the right to ask me to do anything, and I shall do it if it is in my power as one of the finest pleasures left me in life. Any time you two women, or either one of you, want a lecture, or a paper, or a 'pome,' or to be married for nothing and pay my own expenses, why just say so, and there you are. . . . I hold no friends above you except my own blood on this rather battered old planet. Yours indeed"

With the fire well past, Robert Collyer found himself confronted by two great tasks of reconstruction, his church and his home. Both might well have daunted the stoutest heart. The loss on the church was not total.

"Some of the walls are good, and the foundations of course are as good as ever. Perhaps we have \$30,000 worth of property on the ground, with the lot \$60,000."¹²

¹² R. C. to Fleasher Bland (December 30, 1871).

176 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

But there were other and more serious factors involved. "It is well known," says the Trustees' Report in March, 1877, "that the loss sustained by this society in consequence of the great fire consisted not so much in the destruction of church property, as in the destruction of the business and the homes of a large majority of its members." A detailed inquiry into the private losses sustained by individual members of Unity, made during the winter of 1871-2 by one of the trustees, showed the following: "There were at the time of the fire, 170 pewholders, of whom 136 were housekeepers, and 34 were boarding. Of the 136 housekeepers, 56 owned their houses, which were burned; 15 owned their houses, which were not burned; 56 lived in rented houses which were burned, and 9 lived in rented houses not burned; 152 persons had their places of business destroyed, including clerks whose employers' places of business were burned; 115 lost both their homes and places of business by the fire. There were 9 of the whole number of pewholders who entirely escaped direct loss. The aggregate loss by individual members is stated at \$2,850,-200!"

These were the people, ruined, homeless, forlorn, living with friends, or in hastily constructed sheds and shanties, or camping out in the open

air, who, on the first Sunday following the disaster, unanimously adopted Mr. Clarke's resolution to maintain their organisation, and rebuild their church as soon as possible. The courage thus manifested was straightway matched by the generosity of outside friends. The American Unitarian Association promptly pledged \$50,000 for the rebuilding of Unity Church.¹³ In answer to numerous invitations, Collyer addressed great audiences in St. Louis, the Church of the Messiah, New York, the Music Hall, Boston, and elsewhere, and collected during the winter the handsome sum of \$15,000. From Unitarians in England and Ireland came friendly donations. So that in May, 1872, Collyer can announce to Flesher Bland, "I have got together almost \$70,000 and hope to complete that sum." Already, on January 8, the formal meeting of the Society has been held, and, on motion of Gilbert Hubbard, has voted unanimously "to rebuild Unity Church on its present site."

What Collyer had in mind for the future of the church, during these early and distressful days, is clearly set forth in a long letter to the *Liberal Christian* three weeks after the fire.

¹³ This sum was collected from its constituent churches, mainly in New England, and finally amounted to \$59,387.

178 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

" . . . Need for prudence on our part, not only as to where, but how, we shall build . . . has been constantly pressing upon me . . . and the more I have thought of it, the more clearly the true way has seemed to open before me, so that I think I am able now to touch one or two pretty clear conclusions.

And the first is, that not one dollar of the money subscribed by our friends all over the country for a new church shall go toward paying the debt on that we have lost. Whatever is given us must and shall be faithfully built up into a new temple. If the insurance should prove to be five or ten thousand dollars short, we will raise it somehow, or earn it. . . . I am equally determined, as they (my people) are, to pay our debt, principal and interest, to the last penny. Some very mean things have been done, to my knowledge, about church debts when the churches have got into a tight place. Some men acting for God have done what other men acting for Mammon would have been ashamed to do. . . . It is a just debt, and it must be paid, and will. I hope there will be no fear again at the heart of the denomination that we are going in for another splendid edifice that will outshine all the Unitarian churches on the globe. I am willing to consider the reality of beauty I saw for the last time three weeks ago come Monday morning, a splendid tradition. . . . That Unity has gone up like Elijah in a chariot of fire. She is not dead. To me she never will be dead, or to those who loved her as I did. My hope and joy, and crown of rejoicing, for

I held her for God and Christ, God knows! But Elisha, you know, was a homelier pattern than the translated one, he was of the plough, as it were; so must the new Unity be. I have no longing after the old splendour. . . . I shall not only be content, but I shall rejoice, in a plain, spacious meeting-house, where the folks can get near me and I near them, beautiful if you will, because beauty costs no more than ugliness. I would be glad to spend not a dollar for ornament, except where use is ornament, because I believe that always the most useful is the most beautiful. This also I have said to those who by their long and faithful endeavour for the Unity that was, have the most right to know my mind, that whatever we get or give for our new church, must foot the bill. I declare before Israel and the sun that I will not preach in a church of which I am pastor if there be on it a dollar of debt that I know of. I will not recite in this letter the wearisome days and sorrowful nights I have had over what belongs now to the past. I only want to say this just here, that, with this hapless, burnt up parish on my hands, to begin with a debt is to swim with an anvil between my shoulders. Let these hosts of friends give much or little toward a new start, that much or that little must build a church and no more. . . . There is not as much room for debt in Unity parish as lies in that fine line over which the Musselman believes he will pass into Paradise.

I want to say one thing more—it is what farsighted and faithful men about me are saying. If it be pos-

180 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

sible, let the new Unity be a free church in every way. I hope I may be pardoned for the seeming egotism when I say that on every Sunday since Unity was opened, one-half the congregation were strangers. In London, a lady said to me, 'I see a great many Americans, not Unitarians or even Liberals. I am astonished to find how many slip into your church.' So it is, somehow, and so I believe it will be; and there is nothing I would love to do better than this, to fling the doors of the new church wide open, make all welcome, our whole city and our whole country. . . . My first object, of course, will be and must be to build up a true Christian church out of those that are left to us and those that may come. I mean to do that at any cost, so do we all. And then, if there is some special gift by which tens of thousands we can only see now and then are blessed in our dear Unity, as in the great deserts pilgrims are blessed at the wells, for their sake let us cry, 'Whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life freely.'"

Work on the new edifice began promptly in the spring. Collyer writes to Flesher Bland in May:

"We are hard at work on the church, repairing the walls and rebuilding. Shall get the first floor done in about a week. Hope to be in the lecture room early in the fall, and in the church a year after that. It will hold about 400 more people when it is done, than it held before.

Progress was steady, but not without its grave anxieties. The debt on the destroyed church "loomed up like the shadow of coming ruin, and the stroke that warned the Trustees to pay the semi-annual interest sounded like the measured pealing of a passing bell."¹⁴ In 1873, came the financial panic, with its train of widespread commercial wreck. But the people never faltered, giving their utmost out of the little that they had. Collyer toiled like a Hercules. "It has been a terrible job," he writes.

"I sympathise with Brother Moody. He says he used to think the martyrs would be next the throne. He thinks now it will be the beggars."

But all went well. Services, which had been held in a temporary wooden structure hastily erected by the New England Church close by, and generously placed at the disposal of the congregation of Unity on Sunday afternoons, were resumed in the lecture room of the church in the autumn of 1872. The new auditorium was practically completed in June, 1873, but not occupied until December 3, when the formal service of dedication was held. It was a happy time, with no weeping over past gloom, even though

¹⁴ See "Historical Sketch of Unity Church," by Samuel S. Greeley, page 9.

182 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

the Scripture lesson from *Ezra* told how the Israelites wept over the restoration of the temple after the long captivity. Dr. Furness, of Philadelphia, preached the sermon; and Dr. Collyer wrote another original hymn, to match the one sung at the dedication four years before.¹⁵

Meanwhile, there was the problem of the home! The ruin of the old one was complete; but every dollar of insurance was paid, and the prospect therefore not without hope. In the letter of May 23 (1872) to Flesher Bland, Collyer writes:

"We shall build our house this summer, if all is well. We have sold the old lot, 29 by 110, and bought a new one on a better street, 48 by 165, and mean to make the one pay for the other. Shall put \$10,000 into the house. When done, come and see us."

A second letter, just a year later (May 14, 1873), continues the story:

"I owe you an apology for not answering yours of long ago, but I think a statement will be better. I started in a year ago to build a new house. House-building in Chicago costs like cinnamon, and so by October I began to see my way to a load of debt. I

"O Lord Our God, When Storm and Flame."—See "Some Memories," page 246. Also "Clear Grit," page 397.

was groaning over this one day to a wise old brother, who said, 'Ain't you one 'er them big lecturers 'et kin make no 'ind o' money just talkin' raound?' 'Oh, yes,' I said, 'but I cannot talk; I have got the church to see to.' The result was he went around and made the people see they ought to offer me all the time I wanted this season in the lecture-field. They did this gladly, I supplying the pulpit with good men. And so, for between five or six months, between Belfast, Maine, and St. Paul, Minnesota, I scampered round, lecturing five nights a week at from \$100 to \$200 a night, and the result is I have paid all my expenses and cleared about \$10,000. But it kept me so busy and was such hard work, that I had to neglect everybody, and you among the rest. And this 'will quite prevent my going this season to England which I quite meant to do last Fall. I am needed so much here, am so tired of travel, and am so nearly skinned after all by the big house, which costs with the land about \$20,000, that I cannot go. I could find the money but I cannot find the time."

The labours of this winter were profitable both in money and in fame. "Clear Grit," "From the Anvil to the Pulpit," and "The True George Washington" were the chief lectures which he used; and all of them, but more especially "Clear Grit," became as household words throughout the portions of the country which he traversed.

184 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

But the trip was a sore trial, after all—lecturing was no more popular with him now than formerly. There was an exhilaration in facing great audiences, and moving them, as Collyer seldom failed to do, to laughter and tears. When he was on the platform, he felt at home. But the long travelling wore on him greatly, he missed the church, and he longed for the mother and the children. He kept doggedly at it, however, and so far as he could remember in after days, missed not a single appointment.¹⁶

The house, thus built and paid for, was a handsome detached structure of dark red brick, located at 500 North La Salle Street. In a letter to Sir Edwin Lawrence,¹⁷ Collyer described it as

¹⁶ Dr. David S. Utter, of Denver, tells an experience which is illuminating. "When the evening came, the audience (in Belfast, Me.) of nearly a thousand people gathered in the large hall. But the train upon which Mr. Collyer was coming, was late. . . . When I met him at the station he looked very glum, and seemed not to have a word to say. Presently I asked if he had had his supper at Burnham. 'No,' he said, and again was silent. 'Well,' I said, 'but you had dinner a little late at Augusta.' 'No, not a bite since breakfast.' 'Too bad,' I exclaimed. 'Come right in and have something.' 'No,' he said again, as gruffly as ever, 'take me to the hall.' I did so in silence. I feared for the lecture, he was so glum. I introduced him briefly, and went down and took my seat in the audience, and looked up at the speaker as he was saying his first words. It was a veritable transformation! All the gladness, kindness, goodness that this grand and wonderful face could express, glowed upon the audience, and his voice, cheery and strong, rang out so that all could hear."

¹⁷ Dated February 11, 1874.

" . . . ampler and better than the other. I have a capital study, . . . an open fire-place, and a royal bookcase in the wall to my left where all the books are ranged you sent me, with some others. . . . There is another case in the living-room through the door there, in which we keep the books for the family. My working books are in the great study at the church. . . ."

Collyer remained at home during the summer of 1873, to rest himself after his exhausting winter and to watch the progress of the new church; but he enjoyed Flesher Bland's long-deferred trip to the old country as much as though it had been his own. On the latter's return he wrote him as follows:

"I just write a line to congratulate you on your safe return and your splendid time. I had a paper from you with a report of the lecture, and could see it was a good thing. . . . I saw also in the *Ilkley Gazette*, before yours came, that you were in the Dale and preaching 'school' sermons; but I wanted to lick the Editor for merely saying you were formerly of Addingham, and now a missionary in Canada. The donkey—did he not know that you were formerly Addingham itself! Well, it did not matter, you were not forgotten where you belonged. They have more grace in Addingham than we would think, but then you know the king of Mercia had a palace there once and

186 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

sheltered Walfere the Archbishop of York from the Danes in it in 900 and something—I am too lazy to pull down my Ebaracum and look up the *passage*.

“You saw poor Miss Batty, I hope. She must now be very desolate, all gone but herself. Does Ned Hudson of the Fleece remember me—we used to be cronies. . . . And did you see John Dobson (owd John now), and the stone I have put up in the Ilkley church yard to the wife of my youth and that dear half-brother who went up in 1842 to the majority? And does William Duckworth remember me? Marry, he used to pull my teeth, and I feel the ‘flea’ in my arm yet where he bled me. . . . Is that *old* Abraham England who presided at your meeting? He cannot be alive yet. He must be almost as old as old Parr. . . . You must write again when you get the time, and tell me more. I know now where you preached and can hear the noise of the shouting of the host. I knew it would be so. Yours always”

The church work now went steadily forward. Sunday services were held morning and evening. “I have about 700 for a congregation,” writes the minister, “and shall have 10 to 1200 when the North Side gets built up again.”¹⁸ The Sunday school numbered about one hundred and fifty. A Thursday evening prayer meeting was held regularly through the winter and spring. Liter-

¹⁸ Letter to Sir Edwin Lawrence, February 11, 1874.

ary and musical entertainments, lectures and readings were fostered by the Unity Church Fraternity. In February, 1876, the Ladies' Sewing Society organised a "Unity Church Industrial School," for the training in habits of order and industry of young girls in the poorer quarters of the city. A small wood-frame building was rented on Larrabee Street, fitted with a stove, furniture, etc., and daily occupied with classes in sewing, cooking, and housekeeping. Best of all, rapid progress was made in paying off the old debt, which was finally discharged in November, 1879.

Collyer was steadily busy through all these years. Preaching and lecturing were his chief occupations, as formerly; but writing was not forgotten. To Sir Edward Lawrence he says:¹⁹

" . . . I am writing a story, it is my first effort of that sort. I do not know yet whether it will be of any interest to anybody save myself, but if it should turn out as well as can be expected, I shall probably gather it into a volume, and if I do, I want your leave to dedicate the volume to yourself. It is now running through a local magazine and is copied into the *Ilkley Free Press* on your side of the water."

¹⁹ February 11, 1874.

188 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

This book was called "John Watkinson's Wife," and was described in a sub-title as "a story of old Ilkley." Its early chapters showed clearly that the author's forte was not in the field of fiction, and it is not surprising that it was never finished. The paper in which it was published, *The Lakeside Magazine*, perished at the early age of six months, and it was a family joke in the Collyer household that the story had been fatal! Much more successful was "The Simple Truth," "a home book, not exactly a religious book, but more than anything else," which was published in 1878, and had a wide popularity.

Events in this last period of the Chicago ministry—church activities, journeys, family sorrows—are indicated in the correspondence of the time.

To Flesher Bland, August 12, 1874:

"... I am better than I have been. I was tired out and half sick. Have been resting a month, and been out to Colorado among the mountains with the snow on their crests and the summer about their feet. Seen the buffalo on the plains and the Indians on the skirts of the mountains, the gold mines and ranches, and all sorts of curious things, and am much benefited by my jaunt.

"My dear old mother died a month ago last Saturday, aged 77, in great peace, with the children about

her who are still in England, and in the home on the hill where you saw her. I wish you had known her in her prime. It seems to me she was a woman in ten thousand, and the world is dim to me since she went away, though at her age she might at any time expect the angel to bear her away to her rest. . . .

"I have to preach the sermon before the National Conference (of Unitarians) in September, but do not quite know what I shall say. We hold the meeting in Saratoga.²⁰ . . . I had hoped to go to England this summer to see my mother once more, but could not get away. Now I shall not care much about going at any time. . . ."

To Jasper Douthit, January 3, 1875:

". . . I am giving 20 minute lectures on Sunday evenings on the Genesis, Exodus, Psalmists, Prophets, and Gospels of Liberal Christianity in America. Find such lots of grand good things before we came in as

* "I had a curious experience with him in regard to this sermon. He was writing it and sending it to me in pieces in advance. It was from a text that I cannot remember, about some one who went out a day's journey and stopped. The sermon promised to be a brave exhortation such as a leader might give to the people. But half way through he stopped and told me not to print. Then he sent me the sermon on 'The Hereafter.' He afterwards finished the other sermon with a different moral and printed it. Evidently, I thought, he was for a time moved to take his place among the leaders, Hale and Bellows, but shrank from entangling himself in the many activities connected with official leadership." —George Batchelor, in private letter to author.

190 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Unitarians, and recite them no matter who gains or loses. Hope next Sunday to strike the Unitarian 'lead,' but am in no hurry. They are very taking—bring a new audience of about 900 (bless 'em) . . .”

To Flesher Bland, February 1, 1875:

“ . . . I should have attended to this sooner, but we have been fighting death for over two months for our poor little son, who is still very weak, but I hope past the point where the disease will prove fatal. He has had frightful abscesses, the result of a severe cold and fever, they are still gathering but in a lighter form, and yesterday the doctors in a consultation gave us a fair hope. . . .

“I had a nice letter the other day from Tommy Smith, of Bradley, and hear very often from friends at Ilkley. . . . Ask at the library for a book entitled ‘Yorkshire Oddities’ by Baring-Gould, M.A. Some one sent it last week, the author I suspect, and it is very good. . . . I have also got hold of Lister’s ‘Autobiography’—he was of the Puritan time and was at the siege of Bradford when they lined the church tower with wool packs. . . .”

To Flesher Bland, June 1, 1875:

“ . . . I have been laid up with a bad knee, and failed to occupy my pulpit from inability one Sunday, the last Sunday of 16 years ministry. . . . Robert is still

helpless. We have feared for his life long and sadly, but through the tender mercy of God, we hope now to keep him. Emma is engaged to a very nice young fellow. Hattie is to graduate this term and will be a teacher. Annie is taking music—she is too delicate for a regular education. . . .

“Have you read Draper’s ‘Conflict Between Science and Religion’? It is a very strong book, but biased, I think, toward science. If you ever read stories, read the first parts of ‘Under a Greenwood Tree,’ and you will have to read it through. . . . We have just had a capital conference at my church. All the West was there. . . .”

To Jasper Douthit, September 15, 1875:

“. . . We have had a nice time at the sea with the boy, and he is a mite better, just a mite, but a sick boy yet, very! And I am rested. Got off a sermon Sunday about getting home. . . .”

To Flesher Bland, December 11, 1875:

“. . . I am real well, so is ‘Mother.’ Hattie is teaching at \$40 a month, and is a very handsome young woman, though I say it. . . . Emma is to be married some time next year. Annie is still the pet—but dear old Rob, the baby (age 14) is very sick. He is getting well very slowly. I peg away at my work very much as usual. Had an offer which still holds

192 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

water of all my expenses from my door-step back to it, for 26 sermons in England, and 100 guineas I should not be able to spend. I may take it next year, don't know. My dear mother is dead, and that makes a difference in my longing to go over. . . .

"Mr. Jonathan Harrisworth sent over a very pretty Samian ware cup taken out of a Brito-Roman grave at Ilkley for Longfellow, the poet, which I took out to him the other day when I was in Boston, and he was very much pleased. I usually see him when I am East, and we are fast friends. I was to have dined with him on this visit but could not spare the time. Lord Houghton brought a letter to me when he was here—think of that now—he is a very capital old chap, no more like a lord than old Anthony Bland was. Don't you remember how Ilkley was called at that meeting, and as there was no instant response, Brother who-was-it drawled out, 'As-it-was-in-the-beginning-is-now-and-ever-shall-be,' by which time I was half way up the hall with my 5 pounds and turned the laugh on him? . . ."

To the Rev. Thomas Greenbury, September 4, 1876:

". . . I have been out on a two months' vacation. . . . Wandered from Minnesota north-west, to Cape Ann north-east; to Cincinnati also, and then finished up with three weeks at Milwaukee, where the whole tribe of us camped down in a roomy old place on a great bluff withdrawn from the town, and just rested

all day long in a great garden we had overlooking the lake. The boy was amended by the sojourn in his general health, he is still helpless as when you saw him as to his legs. I had a hard day yesterday for the start. Preached in my own church, and in the afternoon at Oakland, and in the evening assisted at an installation on the West Side, so that I feel 'pulled.' . . .

"No new books on this side of any note—Centennial books mainly what there are. I do wish you could have seen the Centennial, it would storm your heart. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, November 3, 1876:

". . . Here we are in trouble, our Sam's wife is on her death bed we fear, a brain trouble running now through some months and so hopeless that we shall all feel as if it is the divine mercy that she shall be taken home. She is a dear good child to us all, and in a lucid hour the other day parted with us all in the sweetest way. . . . Robert Junior is also still on his couch, poor fellow, but there is all the time a little more hope. All the rest of us are as well as usual, except 'Mother' who has now and then a hard time. But we are a cheerful lot when we have half a chance, keep as human, simple and tender as we can without trying to, and just chip along the best way we know. . . . So you well know how things have been going this summer. We have had a nice long rest, and I think I have preached the better for it these nine Sundays. . . ."

194 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

To Flesher Bland, January 2, 1877:

“. . . Don't light your candle at both ends. I can give that advice with a good grace, because I don't take it. I preached three times on Sunday, always preach twice, have been off on a two weeks' lecture tour, say 2700 miles, also to Kentucky and Iowa, and am due for another two weeks in February.

“Yes, the dear good daughter, Sam's wife, passed away in November. . . . She was a pure and sweet girl, with whom was the secret of the Lord. . . . Sam bears up well. I think he is one of the best fellows I ever knew. . . .

“I have at my elbow a curious Mss. volume I imported the other day, containing the history of the Free Grammar School at Ilkley from 1601 to the end of the last century drawn from the archives at Weston Hall. . . . It is interesting as possible and contains a view of Ilkley from the Bridge. . . . ‘Religion and Culture,’ by Professor Shairp, is well worth your notice, and as you are in Diaries, read Evelyn's. It is quite equal in quite another way to Pepys. I am on a Madame D'Arblay's Diary just now, and a new life of John Locke which is very good indeed. Have you read ‘Helen's Babies’? don't fail to get it.”

To Flesher Bland, December 26, 1877:

“. . . Have got such a beautiful painting, done for me last summer by Walter Blackman, of Bolton Abbey, west front, including those fine trees, the ivy, the old

grave-yard and the 'sense' of that sweep of hollow between there and the woods. . . . It came for a Christmas present. O, it is so good to look at it! . . .

"I shall mail to you these holidays a small volume just out.²¹ You have seen one or two of the things. I wanted a little book to give at weddings and go into homes that have still a far future, so put them into shape for that purpose. . . .

All well as usual. Rob mending slowly, goes on his crutches nicely now. . . . All the children good as gold, sturdy and steady for their father in his work every time. Wife and self evidently older and somewhat stout. Church doing well—last notable addition Washburn, our late minister to France. . . ."

To Jasper Douthit, December 30, 1877:

". . . I wished you lived in a virtuous community, my lad, so that you could afford to take a pint of beer a day, and sometimes a drop of wine as Paul would have had Timothy do. (I am Paul, of course.) I don't believe at all in teetotalism in your case, yet it is a great thing to draw others to it, who must be teetotal or lost, and I can not make any other way for you to your purpose, which is noble as a bit of heaven. Every one of the boys who have come up in Unity are good sober fellows, so are the elders I guess as any lot in the town, but I am not teetotal quite, and don't know that I ever shall be, except I am but perhaps as Paul

²¹ "The Simple Truth."

196 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

was in his great journey, and that I don't expect and should be very sorry for. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, March 18, 1878:

". . . Sail D V on the good ship *Scythia* from New York, July 10, for England. Shall be away about three months."

To Flesher Bland, December 21, 1878:

"I got home in very good trim on the 20th of September after the most delightful journey I ever made in my life. I was away exactly three months, was well the whole time, and not sea sick even either on the ocean or coming to France. Stayed a good deal in Ilkley close to 't' owd skooil,' and walking out one night, in the thick dark to finish my cigar, found a man sitting under a tree, gave him another and a light, and sat down beside him, when he said, 'Ye meant know me, aa but I know ye, wha we ewst ta belong to t' institewt together e' Addingham reight at t' start ye know, when Flesher Bland were in,' and so we chatted to late bed time. Bolton looked lovely, but the Devonshire Arms has run down. . . . Went to Fewston 3 times. Read a paper to my old neighbours in the new Board School on 'Edward Fairfax and Fewston.' Also gave them 'Grit.' Dined in great state with John Bramley at Brann Bank. . . . Smoked a cigar and drank a glass of wine with the new vicar of Fewston, who took the chair at the Fairfax meeting and made

a nice speech at the close. But he is 'high,' has candles and things in the simple old church and, if I heard right, has less than a dozen hearers. Says you Methodists are living in fornication, but as I was just lighting a cigar, I didn't say 'Oh, get out,' but saved the thing to report to you and keep you humble. Preached in Leeds twice, and London, Birmingham and Sheffield, and three times in Stowbridge, once in Edinburgh, in Harsham also and Guilford, twice in Liverpool and thrice in Nottingham, and lectured in Fewston, Northcrham, Ilkley, Pudsey and Holbeck. . . . Had a nice ten days in France, and went to see my brother Tom on the edge of Brittany. Lounged along through Surrey with great delight and saw some of the finest bits of the Midlands. Went to Nivaleux—don't think that is spelled right—Oh such a lovely ruin; rode over Sutton edge to Nipon by Thirsk Saw Fountains. Went up to Furness, a matchless ruin there and you lodge in the abbott's own house. . . . Into Westmoreland and through the lovely lake country in a carriage. Over to Carlisle—my, what a sweet cathedral that is always. Went through the markets picking up berries and things, and seeing the rustic life. And that was the way I got to Edinburgh, where the head of the great old house of Constable, the Publishers, came to pick me up, but I had gone south again."

To Jasper Douthit, March 29, 1879:

" . . . This is my experience, that to refrain all I can from contention, preach the broad truth out of a

198 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

kindly heart, not to mind doctrine much, but a kindly human fellowship with those that hear me *very* much, is the way to win. I think one-half my people now have come in out of all kinds of places through this method, and on Sunday nights almost the whole audience is either from other churches or outdoors. . . ."

In June, 1879, just twenty years after the date of his first preaching to the little group of "North Siders" in Chicago, Robert Collyer resigned the pastorate of Unity Church, to accept a call to the Church of the Messiah, in New York.



CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH
As it Appeared at the Time of Dr. Collyer's Call, 1879



CHAPTER XIII

THE CALL TO NEW YORK

1879

"I touch (this) noble story that you might know what grand foundations underlie the Church of the Messiah."—R. C. in "The Fathers of the Church of the Messiah," page 22.¹

THE Church of the Messiah, in New York, was organised on March 19, 1825, at a meeting held in the vestry of the First Unitarian Church (All Souls), "of persons disposed to unite in building a church for Unitarian worship in the upper part of the city," which meant in those days above Canal Street. The persons thus assembled were members of All Souls, and the original plan was to have one society only, with two churches and two ministers. But it was finally determined, after amicable debate, to organise a new society, under the name of the Second Congregational Unitarian Church. The following month lots of land were bought on the corner of Prince and

¹ An unpublished sermon, preached March 10, 1889.

200 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Mercer Streets, and immediate steps taken toward the construction of a building. This was completed in the following year, and dedicated "to the worship of the only True God," on December 7, 1826. Dr. William Ellery Channing preached the sermon, "Unitarian Christianity Most Favourable to Piety," and William Cullen Bryant wrote an original hymn.

Dr. Collyer tells the story of the early days of this church most delightfully in a sermon on "The Fathers of the Church of the Messiah."

"There is a line in one of our hymns," he says, "which bids us 'put divine ambition on.' The youthful church, no babe now but growing, needed no such bidding. The 'divine ambition' lay already in its heart, and after the dedication it was revealed in the choice of a minister, one of the noblest men we ever had to our name, Ezra Gannett, a young man then of 26. He could not come, because they held on to him in Boston. Then they said we will call Orville Dewey. He was in his fair first prime then, and was in New Bedford, where each Sunday was marked with a white stone by reason of his sermon, and people from far and wide were plotting to spend a Sunday there that they might hear him. But Dewey could not come—his church said no, and he heard the church. . . . And so for three years

and two months from the time they bought those lots and built a church, they had to take care of themselves by God's help; but then William Lunt answered to their call and was ordained by John Pierpont, Frederick Greenwood, James Kendall, N. P. Frothingham, William Ware, and Dr. Parkman, all men of a great and historic eminence in the story of our faith.

"Brother Lunt was minister about five years and a half,² and they were troubled years. A sweet and faithful man, as I have heard, and so true to his trust that when his church was set on fire³ and suffered sore damage, it was suspected that this had been done by some one in the name of his God and the interests of the true faith in New York City, but this was not proven. It was built up again and made whole, but in two years after that the minister was worn out and had to resign his pulpit.⁴ It was a sorrow to the people to part with him, and they were very generous and thoughtful, but he saw it was not best to stay even six months longer, and so he went away.

² From June, 1828, to November, 1833.

³ On August 29, 1831.

⁴ Mr. Lunt was a young man, only 23, when he assumed this ministry. He "brought no store of sermons, no prestige, and no experience, to stand alone in a city that hated his creed and his denomination." (Henry W. Bellows.)

202 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

"Then there was a year of that dreary work, hearing all sorts of candidates, and then the man came who made the Church of the Messiah as a city set on a hill which cannot be hid, Orville Dewey, who preached a year not sure that he could preach at all to any purpose.⁵ He told me the story of his poor tired brain just before he died, and how he felt his work was almost done in this world, but he would try what he could do in another church; and the story of what he did in this church has gone out into Christendom. The old records begin to read like the braver and brighter psalms. There was a debt of more than fifteen thousand dollars when he came, and in a year it was fifteen hundred. 'After years of trial and toil,' the record runs, 'during which the society had been sustained by the untiring zeal of its few members, it had reached a great prosperity which seemed to promise a future of great success.' . . . Then, two years since he came and on a Sunday morning, when the services were to have opened, the church was in ruins from fire.⁶

"What was to be done now? They knew exactly what was to be done. They held a meeting

⁵ Installed November 8, 1835.

⁶ Burned to the ground on Sunday, November 26, 1837, by a fire caught from the furnace.

that evening, hired the Stuyvesant Institute, and held services there on the next Sunday. . . . They tell us a great many came into the hall who would never have come to the church and heard our great preacher, and I suspect Peter Cooper was one of these, as his name occurs now for the first time. They tell us also how there was a great simplicity and sociability in these hall meetings which made the congregation seem 'like one great family.' . . .

"A new church was built on Broadway.⁷ Then one year after it was opened, Dr. Dewey broke down. He would fain have resigned, but no man could be found to fill his place, though three were called, and one of them twice. . . . So Dr. Dewey must begin again, lamed as he was on his return⁸ from a two years' sojourn in Europe, and for some years more preached as he was able about three months in the year. . . . Then 40 years ago last November,⁹ this good service and most eminent, came to an end by common consent, and the broken man went to end his days in the Berkshire hills where he was born."

The third minister of the Church of the Messiah was Samuel Osgood, who was installed on Oc-

⁷ Opposite Waverly Place. It was dedicated on May 3, 1839, and baptised the "Church of the Messiah."

⁸ In September, 1843.

⁹ 1848.

204 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

tober 6, 1849, Dr. Dewey preaching the sermon. It was during the latter part of the twenty years' pastorate of this enlightened and noble man that the society unwittingly entered upon the treacherous paths which almost led to its extinction. The church building on Broadway was sold in 1864, owing to the crowding-in of business and the moving of the families of the parish further up town. An Episcopal church on the corner of Madison Avenue and 28th Street was procured for temporary worship, the five lots of land on the corner of Park Avenue and 34th Street purchased for the erection of a church, and the corner-stone of the new structure laid with much ceremony in October, 1866. The architect had been instructed to provide a church and chapel at a cost not to exceed \$120,000. This was \$40,000 more than the actual amount of cash in hand, but it was planned to raise this sum by a sale of pews. When the buildings were half finished, however, it was discovered that the architect had laid out plans which would involve the expenditure of no less than \$320,000. Work was at once stopped, and orders given to reduce the cost of construction to the lowest practicable limit. The result was the present church, chapel and vestry, erected at a cost of \$245,000, and burdened with a debt of \$165,000!

The prospect was appalling; but Dr. Osgood was an able and popular leader, and hopes were high. What was the dismay of the people, however, when a little over a year after the dedication of their splendid building,¹⁰ in June, 1869, their pastor resigned his charge, withdrew from the Unitarian ministry, and was received into the priesthood of the Episcopal church! The blow was a severe one, but it was met by the society without flinching. Fifty thousand dollars, of which twenty thousand was a loan from members of All Souls, was promptly raised to pay off the floating indebtedness of the church, and Rev. George H. Hepworth, the brilliantly successful minister of the Church of the Unity in Boston, called to the pastorate. Then followed two years of great audiences and large income, only to end on January 6, 1872, with the announcement by Dr. Hepworth of his withdrawal from Unitarianism, his dismissal by the church, and the departure of most of the congregation and a large proportion of the society. On November 5, 1872, a call was issued to the Rev. Henry Powers, of Boston, and accepted. But the burden was too heavy, the inheritance of disaster too dire! On January 19, 1874, the new minister resigned, urging that the present building be sold, the stupendous debt

¹⁰ April, 1868.

206 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

paid, and another beginning made on another site.

The situation was now at its worst, but the courage of the remnant still undaunted. At a meeting held on March 2, 1874, it was "voted that with one of the most eligible locations, with a church and chapel surpassed by few in the city, with a property worth more than three times the amount of its debts and liabilities, and having, as we believe, all the elements of success, this society has no just cause for alarm; but, on the contrary, there is, in our judgment, only one thing needed to reinstate us in a vigorous and growing condition, and that is, the early settlement of such a minister as we earnestly intend to engage, not only to bring back in numbers what we have temporarily lost, but to render this church one of the strongest and most popular in the community." In accordance with this statement, immediate steps were taken to secure a minister who should be at once of unquestioned repute and tried ability. The first call was offered to James Freeman Clarke, of Boston, who declined. A second call went to Dr. Warren F. Cudworth, of East Boston, who also declined. Then, hoping against hope, the people turned to the great Unitarian of the West; and on September 21, 1874, voted unanimously "that Rev. Rob-

ert Collyer be invited to become pastor of this church at a salary of ten thousand dollars per annum."

This call to New York was a complete surprise to Mr. Collyer, and brought him sad perplexity. It is evident, from such records of this period as have survived, that in the beginning he was moved to accept. Various causes operated to persuade him to this decision. On the one hand, the burden in Chicago was at its heaviest, and seemed to be weighing down beyond the strength of the minister of Unity to sustain it further. The vast disaster of the fire had been followed within a year and a half by the great financial panic of 1873, and for the moment the city seemed smitten beyond recovery. Building operations had ceased, business revival had ended. All about the new Unity stretched a district still burnt and depopulated, and the question of the future of the North Side was still hanging in the balance. Congregations were large, but they had thus far failed to fill the increased capacity of the church. On the other hand was the well-nigh irresistible attraction of New York, with its swarming crowds, its wide publicity, and its unparalleled openings to influence and fame. Collyer would have been more, or less, than human had he not been stirred by this opportunity to attain, as it

208 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

were, to the summit of a great career by entering one of the most distinguished of all Unitarian pulpits, in the first city of the land.

Aiding and abetting this feeling on his part, were the arguments of those who saw a great boom to Unitarianism in the East through the presence of Robert Collyer in New York, and incidentally a real chance to save the Church of the Messiah, precious from both the material and spiritual point of view, from the fate which seemed to be impending. Rush R. Shippen, Secretary of the American Unitarian Association, was particularly active in impressing upon Mr. Collyer the service which he could render the cause by accepting this call. Dr. Frederick A. Farley, minister of the First Unitarian Church in Brooklyn, wrote of "the importance of saving the Church of the Messiah," and of the "immense field (which) opens itself in this metropolis . . . to a man gifted with powers of popular address and influence." Edward Everett Hale advised him unqualifiedly to come. ". . . I will say," he wrote, "that I think you would be of immense use in New York—that I am sure your coming there with proper guarantees will save the church, which is a very desirable thing to do—that I think you will be of much more use in New York than in Chicago—and, to sum up, and in general

without offering my advice, I should be mighty glad to know you had determined to come."

At a meeting at the Astor House with a committee of the church, held on one of the last days of September, Mr. Collyer gave encouragement to the hope that he would accept the call, but intimated that his mind must first be satisfied as to two things.

The first pertained to the matter of his obligation to the Unitarian churches and individuals throughout the country who had contributed the more than fifty thousand dollars for the rebuilding of Unity. Was not this gift made to himself as minister, as well as to his people, and was he not pledged therefore to continued service in the Chicago field? A favourable answer to the Church of the Messiah was out of the question, indeed could not be considered, until he had been released by formal action of some kind, and he suggested that the problem be laid before certain well-known laymen and clergymen of the East. This was done through Mr. Shippen, with the following result:

"Rev. Robert Collyer,

"Chicago, Ill.

"Dear Sir:

"From the committee of the Church of the Messiah, New York, we learn that they have given you a

210 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

call to become their pastor, to which you reply that you deem yourself in some sense a trustee for the denomination for the money with which Unity Church, Chicago, was rebuilt after the great fire, and that only by some expression on the part of some members of the clergy and laity, giving you release from such trust, can you be set free to give the proposal your serious consideration.

"In reply we desire to say that, while we are not prepared to advise you as to what is wisest and best, we deem the money contributed to rebuild Unity Church as a gift to the cause of liberal Christianity, and it should be considered no hindrance to your entire freedom to serve the cause wherever you consider yourself able to do so most successfully. We are not aware of any trust reposed in or assumed by you respecting it.

"The action of the Church of the Messiah in calling you to their pulpit is for your own consideration alone. We have entire confidence that a high sense of duty will alone influence you. Be assured that, whatever your decision may be, our best wishes attend you.

"E. R. HOAR

EDWARD E. HALE

HENRY W. BELLOWES

WILLIAM C. BRYANT

RUSH R. SHIPPEN

H. P. KIDDER

PETER COOPER

N. CHANDLER

WILLIAM H. FOGG

JOSEPH H. CHOATE

JOHN E. WILLIAMS

D. B. EATON

HENRY BERGH"¹¹

¹¹ This statement was sent to Collyer by a committee consisting of Peter Cooper, Mr. Hale, and Mr. Pierpont. It was accompa-

The second matter which made Collyer hesitate was the financial condition of the New York church. Was there any reasonable possibility of his being able to pay off the enormous debt upon the property, or to draw in new people to the society while the debt remained? On this point, advice was neither definite nor encouraging. The people of the Messiah did their utmost to give him assurance. On October 12, "the largest meeting of the congregation for a long time" was held, and "feeling was unanimous," according to a report forwarded to Chicago, "that under your preaching and guidance we could fill our church, sell our unsold pews, and thus extinguish our debt, and thus make us one of the strongest and most influential Unitarian churches in America." Dr. Bellows, on the other hand, was reported as thinking "the effort hopeless to rescue the Messiah Church—that its only chance is to sell and build anew." Mr. Shippen reported from Boston that "there (was) more distrust than (he) anticipated of the possibility of saving the present church under the existing as-

nied by a personal letter from Mr. Cooper, in which he said: "I am requested by my associates on the committee to say that we hope and pray that you will *at once* send us a letter of acceptance of the call. You will be received here with wide and warm hearts. We think if you make this decision at once, it will lift a load from your shoulders, and *just settle the matter.*"

212 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

pect of its affairs." Opinion was general that as a condition precedent to acceptance of the call, there ought to be a united and strong effort made to lift a part of the debt. Mr. Collyer offered to accept \$7500 a year instead of \$10,000, as his contribution to a movement in this direction. But the people seemed to feel, as one of their number put it, that "no part of (the) debt can be removed until we have another pastor," and nothing definite was attempted. It was pretty plain that the coming of Collyer was expected to work the miracle!

To what extent the perils of this situation influenced Collyer's decision, cannot be known. Nothing is more certain, however, than the fact that it was Chicago, and not New York or Boston, which finally settled the matter. Great was the alarm, and even wrath, in Unity, when it was learned that their beloved pastor had been summoned to the East. Nor were these sentiments confined to the church! They were felt generally throughout the city, of which Collyer was now so conspicuous and indispensable a figure, and received remarkable expression in a great mass meeting held at Unity Church on the evening of Thursday, October 15. At the close of the speaking, the following resolutions were adopted "unanimously and with great enthusiasm":

"Chicago clasps to her bosom her dear distinguished son. She will not let him go.

"Unity Church pulpit is his throne—any other spot on earth is dethronement to him.

"Fifteen years of service have woven him into our affairs and our hearts—we cannot submit to the rupture of the ties so tenderly binding him to us.

"His departure from this section and centre would be a staggering blow to Liberal Christianity and be painfully felt in all the great enterprises for the good of men.

"Those who have built and rebuilt his church think they may of right claim his service therein.

"For our dear Pastor and Friend, Robert Collyer, there can come no 'call' to come up higher—save from Almighty God to place him among the angels of light."

The end of this chapter is told in a letter to Edward Everett Hale, dated October 21, 1874:

"You will have seen by the papers perhaps that I have declined the call to the Church of the Messiah. The truth is, as I hope you guessed when you read the line, that there was nothing else to be done. When it once got out that I was seriously thinking of the change, there came such a revelation of sorrow and dismay, of indignation also—as if a woman heard that her husband that she thought to live and die with was thinking of a divorce—that I had to make my judgment knock under to honour, love and duty, and tell

214 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

them last Sunday I would not leave them now or ever, until I had convinced them I was of no more use. It was not that alone either. I found out I was deeper in the heart of the city than I had suspected. The roots and tendrils of our life in all these years had run together and matted—orthodox, heterodox, and no dox 'went for me.' Out in Dixon also, as I heard last night, where I am not sure I know a soul, the citizens called a meeting to tackle me. From our pastorless churches here also the word came that, if it was a question of dollars or a crowd to talk to, they were going to compete with New York and bar the way. And so I gave in on that score, though the dollars, God knows, did not count this time. I am not sorry, of course, the matter came up, as I did not plot for it and have tried to do exactly right this once. I am sure good will somehow come of it, and I thought I had best write and tell you just how it was, while thanking you from my heart for your good and brotherly aid all through. Yours ever"

On December 6, 1874, Rev. William R. Alger entered upon what Dr. Collyer called "a lovely ministry," at the Church of the Messiah, which lasted until October, 1878. At that time it became clearly manifest that the *sine qua non* of survival was the discharge of the debt, now amounting to \$125,000, under which the church had been staggering for so many years. Indeed, the day of free choice at this very moment passed,

for a judgment of foreclosure on the first mortgage was entered, and the property ordered sold. At this crisis, a small company of heroic women in the society got together and resolved to make one last effort to save the church. Rev. M. K. Schermerhorn, of Newport, R. I., who was occupying the pulpit for two Sundays at just this time, reports what happened: "I drew up a subscription paper. A committee of ladies, the most devout and self-denying I ever saw, stood ready to take it; and for a whole night and day, through wind and slush and storm, to carry it down town and up town, into stores and offices, and shops and parlours, soliciting, urging, entreating contributions. As a result, we find men of modest means and modest styles of living putting down their names, one for \$17,000, another for \$7,000, another for \$5,000, and so on down to a fourteen-year-old-boy, who, aroused by the appeal in church last Sunday, gained his mother's consent to put down his name for \$50 which he had gathered as a prized and precious store. Every person (with two or three exceptions only) in the society contributed something, and with a generosity truly surprising in its heroism, consecration and self-sacrifice; and all, as I am fully convinced, not for *their* cause, but for what they believe to be the interest of the Unitarian cause as

Emboldened by this achievement, the
through Mr. Schermerhorn, then appealed
the members of All Souls to give back
bonds, amounting to \$22,426.12, and
American Unitarian Association for a
bution of \$85,000. Both petitions were granted,
the bonds being returned through the Association,
and the total amount of \$57,426.12 was paid by
the Association against the society as "a
gage never to be payable, either principal or
interest, unless the church ceased to be used
for the purposes of a Unitarian church." ¹⁸ In connection
with the rescue of the Church of the Messiah
from debt, a jubilee conference was held on the
18th and 19th of March, 1879, the fifty-
anniversary of the founding of the society,
at which the principal features were an historical
address by Dr. Bellows and an oration by
George William Curtis.

For the first time in more than a dozen

the Church of the Messiah now faced a prospect which was something other than forbidding. There remained only the task of securing a minister whose appointment should constitute at once a fitting recognition of the large sacrifices which had been made for the redemption of the church, and a guarantee of its future prosperity and power. Little time was lost, and little hesitancy manifested in the choice of a man. With one consent the people turned again to Robert Collyer, and invited him to be their pastor through the following communication:

"Second Congregational Unitarian
Church in the City of New York
(Church of the Messiah) June
9, 1879.

*"Rev. Robert Collyer,
Chicago, Illinois.*

"Dear Sir:

"It is our pleasant duty officially to inform you that at a meeting of the members of this Society . . . held in the chapel of the church on this Monday evening, June 9th, you were chosen pastor of this church, by a unanimous vote.

"It is desired by the Society that your pastorate should commence in September next on such Sunday in that month as you may select. . . .

"For the remainder of this year, commencing Sep-

218 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

tember 1st, viz. six months, the Society have fixed the pastor's salary at five thousand dollars per year. They have also made a special appropriation of one thousand dollars for the expenses of your moving from Chicago here and getting located. . . .

"The crowded attendance at the church for the last two Sundays under your ministrations is an indication of the fervent and unanimous desire of this Society that you accept their invitation and become their pastor.

"Very sincerely yours in Christian fellowship,

"JOHN BABCOCK, Chairman,

"S. D. FLOYD, Secretary."

On June 20, Robert Collyer accepted the call to New York in the following letter:

"Trustees of the Church of the Messiah,

"Gentlemen:

"Your favour of the 9th of June containing the call your church has given me to be its Pastor, reached me duly by the hands of Mr. Hale; and I have to say in answer, the call is accepted. I will do my best to serve you. I can say this without hesitation, while I still feel the worth of my ministry among you must rest with God, and in the generous co-operation of those about me. I cannot but believe that a man whose life is still in the main before him would serve you better than I can, and said this to you frankly. You have not thought so. We must leave this now to time and the great Providence in whose hands we all rest,

I hope to begin my work among you on the first Sunday in October at the latest, and am,

“With pure regard,

“Yours indeed,

“ROBERT COLLYER.”

Why did Mr. Collyer accept in 1879 the call which he had declined in 1874?

In answer to this question it must be said in the first place that the same causes which induced him at the earlier date to consider the New York invitation favourably, were still operative at this time. Thus, the burden of Chicago was still heavy upon him. Unity Church had been successfully rebuilt, the affairs of the society were prosperous, the debt on the old structure was on the point of being paid off, congregations were large, the esteem of the city was as general and as high as ever. But the consequences of the great fire had never wholly been overcome. The scattered parish had never been drawn together as before, the old neighbourhood had not been reconstructed as rapidly or as surely as had been expected, the buoyant hopes of greater days to come which had followed as a prompt reaction upon the disaster and been given expression in the rebuilding of Unity on larger lines, had never been realised. Further-

220 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

more, a certain glory seems to have departed with the destruction of that original edifice, which had been reared with such enthusiasm and adorned with such delight. A material splendour had gone, of course, never to return, and with it, a sense of spiritual vitality, exultation, joy. One was not ordinarily aware that anything was lost. But now and then there came strange, self-forgetting moments when the eye groped for some beauty missed, and the heart for some sensation once familiar, but now unknown; and one knew instinctively that something had permanently disappeared from the church visible and invisible.

Then, too, it is doubtful if Collyer was now the man he once had been. There is real question as to whether he ever completely recovered from the storm and agony of the fire, from the terrific labours of the days and weeks thereafter, and from the long grind of the rebuilding of his church and home, and the re-assembling of his flock. The freshness, the quaint humour, the warm and radiant expansiveness of temperament, the eager zest for the new day and its cluster of new duties—these were not present with him any more, at least in their pristine vigour. Or, if present still, they were overgrown and therefore choked

by certain new elements of being not hitherto revealed. It was at this time that he first showed moods of brooding and semi-introspection, periods of restlessness and discontent, lapses into unaccustomed inactivity. Health there was in him, of course, and it went forth as ever to the healing of other men. But it was health become static, instead of dynamic as heretofore. Else why the repetition of old sermons, that began at this time, and the unmistakable drifting of the passing throng to other and newer pulpit lights? Some declared that Collyer's powers were waning. The first decade in New York showed convincingly that this was not the case. But the power for wholly new and sustained effort was gone. Hence the attractiveness of a new field, where the rich accumulations of a life-time could be made freshly available, and stimulus be given to slackening energy!

And what a new field was this offered by New York! The first city in the country, a beautiful edifice in an unexcelled location, a pulpit second to none in distinction and vast range of influence, a people of tried devotion and quickened enthusiasm! Could he be blamed, after a full twenty years of service in Chicago, for desiring to seize this last and greatest of all opportunities for reaching the multitudes with his

222 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

message, before his powers had entered definitely upon their decline? His labours were certain to be less, his privileges of service greater, in this new field than ever they had been in the old. What wonder, therefore, that he chose it as offering a happy, useful and fitting close to his great career!

Then, too, it must be noted, in answer to our question, that the obstacles which had stood in his way five years before were no longer present. The worry about his obligation to those who had rebuilt Unity, was now definitely gone. The condition of the Church of the Messiah was one of hope rather than of despair. What had formerly presented a perilous hazard now offered a stirring challenge. Furthermore, this church had been saved, as Unity had been saved, not for itself but for the cause. What better service could he render, as his last great contribution to liberal Christianity, than to take this church that had been bought with so great a price, and restore it "to more than the glory," if this were possible, of its former years? The prospect was infinitely attractive now as it had been before, and at this time no obstacle intervened.

But had none of these conditions pertained, it is still reasonably certain that Collyer would

have accepted the call. The decisive factor was neither in Chicago or in New York, neither in Unity Church or in the Church of the Messiah, but in his family; and centred primarily in Mrs. Collyer. For some years she had been ailing in health. Writing to Miss Baker on March 24, 1879, Mr. Collyer says:

“ . . . We are in dolour, but as usual pulling out. Mother has been *very* sick, and Rob so weak and ill after a very severe operation that I began to despair. But they are now at the Hot Springs 700 miles in the wilderness, and amending nicely. . . . If you and Sue can keep a dead secret, I really think I shall have to pull up stakes and bring Mother East to live, or she will die. She is always well when she sniffs the salt air; grows very feeble now staying here and trying to fight it out. My heart aches for her forever and ever, and I think a thorough change might build up the boy also. . . .”

The invitation to New York offered just the change which here is indicated as necessary to the health of Mrs. Collyer, and Rob also, and was accepted primarily, we must believe, for this reason.

The whole situation, as it worked itself out in Collyer's mind, is made plain first, in his address to the people of Unity announcing his ac-

224 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ceptance of the call, and secondly, in a letter to Flesher Bland. Speaking informally after the benediction on the Sunday following his visit to New York, he said: "I have to perform one of the most painful duties of my life this morning in resigning the trust I have held so many years as your minister, and closing my connection with this church, and the reasons for this step must be laid before you.

"Our home, as you know, has been saddened for some years by sickness. It has seemed to me, as I have watched the drift of things, that a complete change of climate might be the best help for this, and so all winter long I have thought of such a change.

"Another reason, and a much stronger one, my good wife insists, is that I ought to make a change, especially if I feel I must, for my own sake. I came to you over twenty years ago with no preparation for this ministry beyond some gift of God, I trust, and what I had won between severe tasks in the factory and at the anvil from the time I was eight years old. You have borne with me nobly, and taken what I could give you, and I thought and said once I would stay with you as long as I lived. But within two or three years I have found my work grow all the time harder and more exhausting. The

demands on a minister in this city are neither light nor few. I met them with no great trouble until within the time I mentioned; but since then the feeling has grown on me steadily. I have mentioned more than once that another man would do better here, and I would perhaps do better somewhere else. I want more of a margin for my pulpit preparation as I grow older, and to use a great store of things I have treasured where they will come home with fresh interest, and not to rest so much as to work on another line. If I should stay with you this feeling would grow as I grow older, and then the day would come when it would be sadder for us all than it can be now, because we should feel we had made a mistake and cast away an opportunity.

“I am willing to try this new field of labour which has opened to me again in New York of its own accord. I think it may open new springs in my own nature, take the tired feeling out of me, and give me a chance to use my store of things already gathered for the germs and seeds, at least of my pulpit work, and help make me good for some years more. . . . My dear friend, Bishop Clarkson, writes me from somewhere in the wilderness that I shall never find such friends again as these I have on the shores of

226 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Lake Michigan. I don't expect to find such friends again, or make such a home, or be so sweetly rooted down again as I have been among you; but for the reasons I have given you, the step must be taken, and God help us all to bear the pain of it the best we know how."

The following letter to Flesher Bland was written on July 8:

"It may be you have seen the statement that we are going to New York. I have felt for some time that we ought to give poor Rob a chance at a new climate, and my wife's health also has been failing, while I have begun to feel the pull of all these years, and long for a fresh audience and a new field. So a very urgent call to New York to the congregation which called me before, has been accepted, and we shall move in September. It will not be any advantage to us at the start in income, perhaps never, but this is just as well. I should have hated the thing to take that form, and we shall be able to get along. . . . It is Sunday school picnic to-day, so I must cut this short. Always yours"

On Sunday, September 21, Robert Collyer preached his last sermon as minister of Unity Church. It was full of personal intimacies and recollections, as where he said, "You have never held me as one set apart and above you, who could not laugh on occasion, or touch the springs

of laughter, or love old ballads, or be touched by noble music, or witness a wholesome play, or could not stay to the supper but go out before the dance, or could not tell stories to the children that have nothing at all to do with Moses and the prophets, or be interested beyond measure when young men and maidens God had made for each other caught the secret he had kept for the true moment. In all these things it has been my pride and joy to be one with you, to the peril, I suppose, of what some men call ministerial dignity." But the prevailing note of the sermon was one of dignity and soberness, touching at times the heights of mystic rapture, and ending in a deep passion of tenderness, as befitted such an occasion of farewell.

A reception, tendered to him the following week, was quite as much a city as a church affair. The great significance of Collyer's ministry to Chicago and the West was indicated in a long editorial in the *Tribune*, entitled "The Rev. Robert Collyer's Departure."

". . . There are theologians in the city," wrote the editor, "who can easily confound him with their logic. There are clergymen who are superior to him in intellectual ability. But not a clergyman in Chicago has found a home in the hearts of the people like that which Robert Col-

228 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

lyer occupies; not one could leave us and be missed by men of every church and every creed as a personal friend, as will he. The very sight of his face was medicine for any hurt, and the grasp of his hand was a tonic for any doubting, despairing heart. In all these senses he was a minister. Of the religion of the head which busies itself with the fine-spun distinctions of creeds, he knew very little; but of that religion of the heart which brings one into close, warm sympathy with men, women and children, . . . which aids those who suffer, strengthens those who are weak, and makes life seem brighter, fresher, and better worth living for us all, he knew the secret, and was the chosen high priest.

"The City of Chicago will bid good-by to Robert Collyer not only with regret as a minister, but also as a citizen. He has been with us nearly a quarter of a century, and during that time has been prominent in every good work and word that has conduced to municipal prosperity. It is perhaps not saying too much to claim that he has done more than any single man to make the city respected abroad. . . . During the war he never faltered in his patriotic devotion to his adopted country. He gave himself to the best interests of the soldiers with all the ardor of his nature, and they came to regard him as their

best friend in Chicago. . . . In that dismal, discouraging week of the fire, his 'clear grit' showed itself in his gathering together those of his flock whom he could find and preaching to them in the still smouldering ruins of his old temple. . . . In all that goes to make a good citizen he was active and efficient, and, unlike most ministers, he was so large a part of our city life that every one who has heard of Chicago has heard of Robert Collyer. . . ."

On Sunday, September 28, Collyer appeared in the pulpit of the Church of the Messiah, escorted by Dr. Frederick A. Farley, of Brooklyn, and Dr. Edward Everett Hale. He preached from the text, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord." The Chicago ministry was ended, and the New York ministry begun!

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH

1879-1896

"How fond we should be of the Church of the Messiah and true to it—and not hold it for enjoyment to ourselves, but for joy in God and his truth, and in the good we can do by good and honest endeavor and by just and wise generosity. To all this I believe you will say Amen, for in these years you have never failed me."—R. C. in "The Fathers of the Church of the Messiah," page 22.

WITH his advent in New York, in the fifty-sixth year of his age, Robert Collyer entered upon a period of his life which was as quiet as it was happy. No great change now awaited him—no great events diverted or troubled the even current of his years. Joys came to him in new friendships, fruitful labours, abundant public honours. Sorrows afflicted him in the passing of old associates, the deaths of beloved ones in the home, and a second ordeal by fire; once in his late old age, he had to lift and carry again the full burden of his ministry. But these were no



THE MESSIAH PULPIT

From a Photograph by Hans Müller, taken on Christmas Sunday, 1912



other than the ordinary rewards and vicissitudes of long-continued life. His days were now the days of one who has put forth boldly into the open sea, dared the storms and terrors of the deep, and come at last, tried, tested and richly cargoed, into the haven of his desire. This does not mean that he proceeded now

“ . . . to pause, to make an end,
To rest unburnished, not to shine in use,
As tho' to breathe were life.”

Collyer was active to the very end of his days. In his early years at the Church of the Messiah he was far busier than he anticipated when he left Chicago, or ever really desired.¹ Two sermons a Sunday, frequent addresses at public dinners and meetings, denominational duties, the pastoral care of a rapidly growing church—all these absorbed his energies to a point which at times discouraged him and threatened to break him down. But the romance of his life was over. His story, with one dire exception, now includes only the routine duties in the parish, happy revisittings to Unity, the annual preachment at Cornell, rapturous summers in Europe or more quiet ones in the mountains and

¹ “I know no busier year in my life,” R. C., in Report to Church of the Messiah, February 10, 1881.

232 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

by the sea, and by the ruling of kind fate, no grim adventure or disaster. Serenely, from the toils and triumphs of his manhood, he moved into a beautiful old age; and then, like a tired child, fell gently upon sleep.

A house was found for Collyer and his family, before they left Chicago, at 139 East 39th Street. Three years later they removed next door to number 137. Six years later still, in 1888, the family took its flight to the Strathmore, at 52nd Street and Broadway. A final pilgrimage was made, in 1901, to an apartment at 201 West 55th Street. In the 39th Street homes, when the family was still unbroken, hospitality was dispensed, as in Chicago, with a lavish hand and a joyous heart; infrequent were the intervals when no visitors were present.

His relations with the church, from the first moment of his arrival, were of the happiest. There were passing periods of weariness and discouragement which led to rumours of discontent with New York, and of desire to return to Chicago. Once at least, in 1882, these rumours were so persistent as to call for public denial; but at no time did they have any basis in real fact. In his Report to the church, on February 10, 1881, Collyer thanks the people for their "great kindness," and assures them that "this has been one

of the happiest years of (his) life." "We were prepared," he says, "for an abatement of the joy we had in the old home, but we find that in many ways it has increased." Similar statements occur without exception in later reports. Certainly the prosperity of the church was occasion for satisfaction. Letters of this period are highly interesting—

To "Dear Bairns," October 27, 1879:

" . . . The congregations are still good as ever. Last night they had to bring in chairs, and I think they rented seven pews yesterday. We have over 100 families, began with less than 40. . . . Gracious, how good those feel who have waited and hungered and worked for the brighter day. . . ."

To Samuel Collyer, October 9, 1879:

" . . . Annie is playing on her new piano. It is very sweet and beautiful to look at. This is my study, a lovely little room with a few pictures, a great deal of light, and a balcony where Mother and I have been smoking our cigar after tea, and an enormously hot day in which I took shelter in the big shadowy Astor Library. . . . We went to Coney Island Monday, but the bloom has been rubbed off and it is fearful work getting there with Rob and Mother. . . . I went to a wedding at Brooklyn, bridegroom took me over. The fee seems to be \$25 in gold, *R-Raa*; but the refresh-

284 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ments were only so-so, pickled oysters, ice cream and water—O yes, and coffee, but no bride's cake. . . .

"A great many people are dropping in to see us. We are going to be bothered with the bad ventilation in the church. The trustees report that the income of the church has gone up to within a trifle of the outgo at one jump, and a good many districts to hear from! It keeps them busy to rent pews Sundays, *R-Raa* again. . . . Mother is utterly homesick, by far the worst of the lot—the pinch has not come to me yet nor much to the children. . . . I am not sure but a box of books is missing, and am greatly troubled. Cannot get them straight yet, to save me. New York is a wonderful place. I get the impression mornings that the whole town is rushing into the North river, and in the evening that it has thought better of it and is rushing home again."

To "Dear Bairns," November 24, 1879.

". . . Had a nice time yesterday as usual. They rented 7 pews, which makes 87 since we took hold. . . . Yesterday afternoon I went to speak by invitation for the Y. M. C. A. . . . Had a big hall crammed full and they begged I would come again. Went to a swell breakfast last week at twelve o'clock—it was as good as a dinner. To-night we are going to the opera—have a box from one of our folks. Mother isn't going to wear a 'bunnit.' The opera is *Aida*. Carey sings. How swell the people are you would not believe. . . ."

To "Dear Bairns," Easter, 1880.

" . . . We are all well. Mamma is dreadful well—eats like a ploughman. . . . We are counting the days until we see Rob and Phil.²—it is only a month now. No fear of my being bothered. I can clear out to the church study. What we want is to have the boys *come*. We are real lonesome. . . . I read 'Westminster Abbey' last evening—a big audience and a snow storm. . . . Rob is howling for his tea—quarter past six. The veal yesterday was roasted to death, but Oh, the stuffin', that was 'eavenly. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, November 8, 1879.

" . . . The church has been full ever since we came . . . and the income of the church, that item so fruitful or fatal in our purely volunteer system, has risen from a very low line to between eight and nine thousand dollars, and is steadily rising. Better than this, many tokens come of good done to weary and woeful human lives. . . . And New York is a wonderful magnet. Its splendid life, superb architecture, parks, galleries, libraries and book stores just storm one. . . .

"If you are moved to do a little for the old meeting house, of which I send paragraph, let me know and I will do something too and send you a draft. It was the first place I ever preached in. . . ."

² Mrs. Hosmer's (Emma) children.

236 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

An interesting sidelight on Dr. Collyer's inner nature is shed by a letter to his son, Samuel, on November 26, 1879, in regard to a proposal of the latter to accept a business opening in Colorado.

"I am much interested in what you tell me about this offer. There are two ways of dealing with it. Either to say 'No' at once, and of your own volition, and then make no secret of the fact that you have had the offer; or make every preparation for accepting it, for if you once move in that direction, it will end I think in your going. You cannot go out and back in a week, and whether it would be fair to the Firm to take such a trip without their formal consent, you must judge, and I know your instinct would be true. So if you can make that all right and Louise would like to go out, and you feel free to take this first step which is almost sure to end in a change, go by all means. It has been a very sacred thing with me, as you know, to follow a certain inward impulse. It was what brought me over sea, and, as you say, took me to Chicago, and again it would have done the fair thing by me in this last removal had the painter not been tampered with by cross-magnets—my old promise to stay all my days, the enormous strength of the ties which bound us, and the lack of adventure which comes with age. Now if you feel that impulse, follow it, and I do not believe you will regret it. . . ."

The decision of Samuel, however, to go to the far West, brought shock and dismay to the family in New York. Thus, on April 1, 1880, the father wrote—

“My dear Son—We are just heart-broken. We look at each other with tears in our eyes. It did not seem possible before your letter came that we should take on so. Mother is especially cut up. . . . Now can you not come down before you go? Spare a week and bring the little wife, and I will stand \$100 for expense. It does not seem possible to let you go before you have seen us. We are all of one mind—all fretting. We want to see Sam and his wife and Meesie, bless her!”

Other letters continue the story of life in the new home and parish.

To Samuel Collyer, November 26, 1879—

“... Alger tells me he is engaged to preach for Unity three months. I think he will have large congregations. His thought is very fine, his manner (too) faultless, a good thing after such a rough chap as I, and he promises me by the heavens above that he will preach simple sermons!”

To Flesher Bland, September 30, 1880:

“... The work goes on very nicely here—the city a wonder as I told you, and ever more wonderful, and

238 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

very beautiful now in these upper reaches where the horse chestnut has broken out into perfect bloom and the wistaria tossing its great clusters in the wind, blue as a northern sky. I enjoy the book-stores beyond measure—they are simply inexhaustible. Scribner gets all the new books from London and it is lovely to stop in on a Monday. I don't buy as many as I would like because I never sell any and there is no more room, still I do buy. . . . It is 30 years to-day since I landed at this Port. How I wonder when I think of it and say, O so humbly, it is not of works, it is the gift of God. . . . I have been lecturing on Wharfedale, also on Bolton Abbey and sent the paper to the *Modern Review* in London—corrected their proof last week and it will be in the July number. I don't think the Bolton is as good as the Wharfedale. I got too wrathful at the greed of the monks to write with grace. They have made my salary \$7000. I get \$1200 from the house in Chicago less the taxes, so can save \$2000 a year now for poor Rob who will go halting all his days. We shall go, I think, to Nantucket for the summer. . . . My wife is not at all well—breaks down woefully.”

To Flesher Bland, September 30, 1880:

“ . . . This summer I was within sight of Montreal. . . . I was among the Green mountains visiting some friends and getting all the fresh air there is looking up places where we licked you British, and enjoying my-

self very much. . . . Went yachting for about 10 days, and fishing, and anything a lazy man may do. . . .”

To Samuel Collyer, January 3, 1881:

“This comes wishing you all a very happy new year and many more of the same stripe. We see by the papers you have very cold weather, but suppose you do not mind that very much, being such old settlers; it is only strangers who have very hard times in new countries. It is matter of some small anxiety whether you got your hamper in time for Christmas. Mother got it off in plenty of time for 'Frisco but that queer twist at Denver first to Canaan City and then by stage would be a trial to the pudding which was not very tough, poor thing, still we hope it worried through without the inscription I proposed to write on for celerity and safety—Dine-a-mite. Henery John turned up duly and turned out something of a calf. It was a trial to Mother to look after him the couple of weeks he was with us. He would not get up when he had gone to bed or go to bed when he had got up, or hit a meal time until we were about through; then he would rush in as if it was a railroad restaurant scramble. He was a great trial to the old lady but she bore it like a hero and on last Wednesday he got away in the '*Bothnia*.'

“Sam Merrit's family—all but Sam—were with us at Christmas. They are Yorkshire but nice Yorkshire. It has been rather terrible weather here, bitter and

240 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

stormy, but we have kept warm and rubbed through cheerily. Very good congregations yesterday and in the morning we took up a collection of \$370 for the Hospitals. It is thought in this family that Master Joe Eastman has intentions and we *have* heard something about a diamond ring. This is the dearest of all dead secrets which we only talk of in our own chamber with the door shut in a faint whisper, and these are the terms on which this word comes to you twain. I did think just now I would leave all this out and begin again, but it is all so nicely done I guess I will let it go. I am to have a sleigh ride this afternoon "ferninst" a pair of horses that can whip out anything this side Vanderbilt's. Mother is ever so well, so is Rob except his legs, poor lad, which are much better. He wants Dr. Taylor to put the clamps on them. I hear him bawling out a fine basso upstairs as I write these words. Hattie and Annie are first rate but lazy. I go next Monday to see about the installation of Mr. Milne on the 12th; shall get back before Sunday. He came in last evening and said the prayer in the services. He is a very bright, breezy fellow and I think will answer. We had sundry nice things sent us at Christmas, among the rest some very nice cigars and a wild goose which might have flown in from a better world, he was so sweet and tender, and a table lamp which just makes the parlour like a palace, a bottle of genuine old Scotch peat peek whiskey 30 years old I am going to save until Sam comes if it will keep, and so on. . . . Preached last evening my

fine old discourse about George Stevenson. What a blessing it is nobody has ever read one's books. Give Grandpa's very best love to Meesie. Tell her just to toddle down and stay a year, and to that boy who by this time must be able to understand such a message, and to everybody."

To Flesher Bland, March 16, 1881:

". . . The Mother is in Chicago seeing the grand-bairns. Annie is the housekeeper and very clever. Hattie is engaged to be married in June—the young gentleman, a Mr. Eastman, with the family are all in the church. . . . Sam is doing excellent well in Colorado, and Mrs. Hosmer is well and happy in Chicago. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, June 27, 1881:

". . . Dear me, how far away that day is now when we used to crowd into the chapel what time it was given out you would preach, and what a sermon that was from the 51st Psalm, and how I used to enjoy coming to your house and sitting in the chair on the right hand side of the fire-place after you took to me, and how proud I was to go to 'Bunsaa' to preach in your stead. And do you know that until I was lighting this cigar, it didn't occur to me how disgusted they must have been to see me when they expected to see you. . . . Hattie was married last Thursday. . . . I gave the

242 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

young folks a lot of nice books, all my own among the rest, beautifully bound, and of these they are very proud, as of course they ought to be. . . .”

To Flesher Bland, September 28, 1881:

“ . . . My lad goes to-morrow to live with his brother. We think it is best for him to take hold of life now, and turn it to some purpose. Sam wants help in his business and his good wife will be a human providence to the boy. He is in good spirits and wants to go, even with a lamed wing, as our young always do. . . . We have been wanderers this summer, least-wise, I have. The women took to the Catskills and then to Saratoga, but I went from there to the mountains and the sea. I love the sea best and then ‘the everlasting hills.’ ”

To Flesher Bland, St. Valentine’s Day, 1881:

“ . . . I have been interested in one of your poor Addinghamers, Joseph E——, a primitive local, I believe. He came over on a sort of blind errand to clean clocks, finds there are more clock cleaners than can get along, and so is ‘born back.’ Of course he ‘hez nowt’—indeed the first thing I learned of him was this interesting fact. And so I gave him money, poor old man, and the Commissioners are to send him home. The women folks will roast him a little ham and fry him some chicken and make him a ‘kwin loof’ and see

to his underclothing, and then he will get home in good shape. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, May 2, 1882:

" . . . We are in dolour about the poor lad who has come home from Colorado very sick and lame. It is a dream of mine that I shall take him to England with his mother about a year from July, and stay a year there in the native air, mostly. I have sold the homestead in Chicago for \$22,000 and we can make out about \$14,000 more by that time. . . . I shall get a long rest which I need after all this hard work. In that case I shall give up here. It is hard for me. Four years will be all I want. They want me back very sore in my old parish, but I trust they will be well suited long before then, and I shall find a parish in New England where I can return to my country likings and longings. It is all a dream and may not come true, but I love the dream. . . . The volumes of Carlyle's life just out are well worth reading. They draw one to the sturdy honest man very strongly. I do not like many of his judgments of men, but he was a hero in his way and very noble, resolute to stand for one true man, and generous in some things in quite an over-measure. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, November 22, 1882:

" . . . We went to Lake George this summer where I claim I slept three weeks. Lake George is a para-

244 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

dise of pine clad hills and clear waters studded with islands and wild farms. This was the old line occupied by the French before the Revolution and is full of forts and battle-grounds. It is now peaceful and sweet! . . . My book is just about due, and 3 etchings. . . . Have you seen the new (and only) history of Skipton, a fine Octavo of 400 pages? . . . If Will goes in for metaphysics, Martineau's 'Spinoza' is good. . . . I am taking more kindly to my work here and imagine the roots may yet strike in. . . ."

On June 30, 1883, Robert Collyer sailed on the *Furnesia* for England—his fourth summer journey to the mother country, and his first since his advent in New York. He reached home shores again on the *City of Rome*, on September 13. In a letter to a Boston friend,³ published on September 24 in the *Transcript*, he says of this trip—

"I had a delightful journey, wandered round and round by moor and dale to my heart's content. . . . Found hosts of friends of my own age, and wondered how they could look so very old but did not say so, and saw the same wonder in their eyes about my looks but they did not say so, for we were all on our guard. Drank tea and chatted by bright cottage fires, found the burdens the poor have to bear far lighter than

³ Unidentified.

they were fifty years ago, and thanked God for that, and for the brighter and better life that is slowly stealing over my good old England. Preached and lectured where I happened to be. Preached indeed every Sunday but one, when I went to the old Methodist meeting-house among the moors; they invited me to preach there also, but I said, 'No it will get you into trouble with the conference.' And then they said, 'We will risk the conference if you will take the service.' Still, I had the grace to hear the good fellow, a working mason, I think, who had walked ever so many miles with a sweet little sermon in his heart, and was not sorry that I did not preach that day."

More particulars of this visit to England are contained in a letter to Flesher Bland, September 26, 1888:

"I had ever such a pleasant visit to the old home. . . . Found the weather cold and blow-y pretty much all the time, a few fine days but not many. Did not go out of England at all. Spent three weeks in London and at a country-house on the edge of Windsor forest, and the rest in Yorkshire, except a run into Worcester and Warwick. Went up to see William Bland on a lovely Saturday afternoon and drank in all that glory from among the roses which were all abloom in his door-yard. Scanned the library of the young preacher who has been boarding there and rather respected the man who had such books. . . . Preached

246 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

three times in London, twice in Leeds,⁴ twice in Birmingham, once at King's Ride in Berkshire, and in Liverpool the night before we sailed. Lectured and preached in Ilkley, lectured in Skipton and Burnsall, and so got through a good deal of work. . . . Took the chair at the annual festival of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society and made the address. Dined with John Bright, breakfasted with Forster, and saw a sight of nice good folk in London. . . . Saw a good many Methodist preachers and they were all ever so kind, and got ever such a handsome compliment from a canon of York at a great dinner in London. It was all sweet and good right through. I did no end of wandering round in pleasant lanes—got my very fill of it all, so that I should not fret if I never went again. You have no idea how I drank it all in and was satisfied as never before. The sun lay on the hills and filled the valleys, and the storms swept over them, the heather came out as I watched it, and I sat by lots of old friends far and wide and talked of the old times. . . . They wanted to know if I would not come back and settle in London, and I said, 'Nooooo'! So I am home again and full of content. Love this new world better than ever. . . ."

Other letters may best continue the story of

⁴ The reception which Collyer had must have been very gratifying to him. "Not a foot of unoccupied space was to be seen within the walls of the old chapel; and many people were content to crowd the doorways and even the porches, in the hope of picking up a sentence or two of the sermon." (Leeds newspaper account.)

these quiet years. To Jasper Douthit, Collyer writes on November 2, 1883:

"I am ever so glad to hear from you even when you feel a little under the weather. . . . I do not stake my soul or any fathom of it on our sect, only on our faith beautiful, reasonable and true, and not yours, or Eliot's, or that of my gentle Savage or my ever dear Chadwick, or Clarke's, or Channing's, or Parker's, or mine even if it comes to that, but *ours*. I see this faith growing and ripening everywhere, and so do not lose heart. . . . When I was a child I used to play under a young oak on a bleak hillside and roll my Easter egg down the slope within its shadow toward the sun. When I saw it again after 25 years, I said 'Bless me, that tree has grown smaller,' and said so to Master Ward who owns it. 'No,' he said, 'your eyes have altered, it's bigger, still I think we might help it, so for your sake I will put on some manure.' He put on the manure, but this summer I still said, 'You are the same old oak; you do not grow to suit me at all; you should be the king of the forest, because I love you so.' And then the oak said, 'That's the trouble. I shall be the king of the forest if you will only wait half a millenium, and an oak with my future can afford to wait. It's only those fellows over there that have no real sound heart in them that cannot afford to wait, so don't bother about my leanness.' *Our* faith in God, not in some dogma about his word—the large, free, sweet and sure gospel about which we are all at one, that's grow-

248 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ing, and acorns are being shed from it and borne on the wings of all the winds, and they hide themselves in the coverts and sprout and strike down roots and shoot up slowly toward the sun and are trees of God's planting, and that's the gospel truth.

" . . . About staying, holding on, living, working, being, well, I am willing to go when I sign my name to this letter, but will stay just as long as the old body will let me, and thank God for the years. Don't take any stock of tiredness of life, or think there is no reason save clear duty for holding on. 'There's fennel for you yet, and columbines, and there's rue for you, and here's some for me, we may call it herb, grace-o'-Sunday, and there's a daisy.' And I say they are not for the decking of our shrouds when time has brought disillusions, but for glorifying these dusty commons of life we have still to cross. . . ."

To Rev. V. D. Davis, February 27, 1884:

"The pretty little monograph came safe and sound. . . . I only envy one man in England his church, and that's you. I think I could preach there to some purpose, it is so homelike, a drawing-room of the 17th century with permanent sittings. If your people go to sleep, which they won't do, of course, you can reach out your hand almost and jog them; or raise your voice one tone, and they will rub their blessed noses and make believe they just closed their eyes to follow better the noble argument. Herrick threw his sermon

book at the heads of sundry when they did that, but you must beware! Not that yours will be heavy, but it is so short a range. I fell in love with Toxteth Park Chapel on sight . . . and with the tiny God's rood, for it is not an acre, all glorious in the summer light and sweetness; and if I could bring my mind to lay down my old bones anywhere outside this new world, why, it would be there.

"Put a more loving accent and emphasis into your benediction, if that be possible, the Sunday after you get this note, and that will be mine and yours to the congregation. I shall be eating my fishballs just then, for it will be my breakfast-time, but that will not matter."

To Flesher Bland, June, 1883:

" . . . We have Rob, aged six, from Chicago, who went with me up the Hudson yesterday, being Monday, and was greatly entertained by some pancakes we got at a Dutch tavern, also lemonade. . . . The young folks uptown seem quite happy. Baby Lucy is a phenomenon of excellence . . . not of the sort which can be set down in a letter but of the unspeakable perfections you can never understand until you are a grandpa. . . . Have been reading Cicero on old age with great delight in a new translation. He was far ahead of our Old Testament men in his faith in immortality."

To Flesher Bland, November 18, 1884:

250 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

" . . . All here about as usual. Robert Jr. is to have an operation on Monday, when that bad bone will be taken out, and the doctors say he will then have a good chance for his life. God in his mercy grant us that boon. . . . The tenant for some years of the pretty farm-house close to Fairfield Hall was in here to dinner with his wife on Tuesday. They will settle here if they can. . . ."

Old friends were now passing one by one. Lucretia Mott, dead in 1880, was a sore loss. Three staunch supporters through the twenty years at Unity, Gilbert Hubbard, Judge Peck, and Eli Bates, were memorialised together in a sermon preached from his old pulpit on July 2, 1881. Peter Cooper died in 1883, and Collyer delivered the address at the great funeral service on April 7. Scarcely a letter goes to Flesher Bland these days which does not make sad mention of some former associate in Ilkley, Fewston, or Addingham who has passed away. A very tender epistle is that which was written from Black Rock, Connecticut, where he was spending the summer of 1885 with his children and grandchildren, to Mrs. T. E. Paget, of Liverpool.

" . . . Your mother's death was to be expected on any day, so great was the length of days she had attained, and when she wrote me last and I replied cheer-

fully, as was fitting for so bright and cheerful a spirit as she revealed to the last, still I felt this might be the last and good-bye, just as I did when I shook hands with Emerson a few weeks before his death. And you must sorrow for her death; there is no way open for us but that, when they die we love most dearly, no matter what their age, and especially when like mother they maintain their interest in life and their love to the last. . . .

"Mother's was a beautiful rest and joy. She was one of those Bunyan saw sitting in Beulah in the sunshine waiting for the angels, their work all done and the way of their pilgrimage past. I have known but few who have fallen on so happy a lot. My own dear mother came to it at last but not so soon, or for such a span of time, but I am always so glad she had that spell of resting in the sun before she was folded in the white robe and borne away. . . . I thank God for letting me see the face of your mother and giving me the blessing of knowing her these seven years since she sat by that bright fire and I fell in love with her as we say 'on sight.' If I should have to stay here to a good old age, I shall mind what she has taught me—and old Peter Cooper and just a few more. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, September 19, 1885:

"We are still in the sweet green country by the sea. . . . We have had a rare summer, never had such a rest in my life, only preached five times, twice for the

252 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

orthodox people here, twice for the Universalists of Bridgeport, once at the seaside. . . . Mother, Annie and Rob well as ever, thank the Giver of all good, but I'se gettin' owd, and would love to go on half time."

To Jasper Douthit, November 6, 1885:

" . . . I am just as when you saw me only older, not a day to look at, my friends say, but I know better. I behold my natural face in a glass, and do *not* forget what manner of man I was. Mother is lame, but not so lame as she was. Indeed she is very much like that old man Isaac Walton knew, who, being subject to two disorders, was always thankful they never came together, and whichever happened along he was so thankful it was not the other. Rob is on his crutches but ever so well. Hattie has two of the bonniest children they make up yonder. . . ."

On February 10, 1886, Annie, the beloved of Dr. Collyer's heart, passed away. This was the first great personal bereavement that he had suffered since the death of his mother, and it shook him terribly. Writing to Flesher Bland, as late as April 29, 1886, he says—

" . . . It is still a sore trouble, though we know our darling dwells with the blessed ones where there is no more pain and waits for us to come, but not as we wait to go. Mother has been very feeble, but is pick-

ing up again, and is going this morning to plant some flowers in the lot at Woodlawn. It is a lovely bit of land with a gentle slope and look westward. . . . We shall be laid, please God, on her right and left. Mother will go this summer to Chicago, . . . and I may go to England and Switzerland. . . . It will help me to get well again, perhaps, for the springs of life have been badly tried, and the old hurt I got at the great fire in '71, turns up in the old shape of not being quite myself. . . ."

On June 29, Collyer sailed in the *Germanic* for his fifth trip to Europe. This time he travelled farther and stayed longer on the Continent than he had ever done before, visiting Belgium, Holland, Prussia and Austria. England was not forgotten, however, Yorkshire least of all, and happy days were spent in London, York, Exeter, Ilkley, Fewston and Otley. He visited the old friends, as formerly—mourned over "the smoke from the great black towns drawing up past Denton Hall and lying on the lovely valley—had a week at Middleton far up toward the moor while the farmer folk were busy with their hay and the soft summer wind drew through the pines and stirred the blue bells and the heather"—visited the site of his father's old smithy at Blubberhouses and brought away a cinder out of the old slag heap now "all

254 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

grown over with grass." On his return at the end of September he wrote his daughter, Mrs. Hosmer—

" . . . Mother seems ever so well. She does not cry so much, or so pitifully at all. And I am feeling more free from 'the bondage of corruption,' thinking of our darling more and more as a radiant and blessed spirit, waiting and watching for us. It was terrible and quite heart-breaking while my heart was buried with her in the grave, and people say my hair has grown quite white. . . ."

A letter to Flesher Bland, January 18, 1887, indicates a real restoration of spirit:

"It is always like a bland breeze from over Droughton Moor to read one of your letters. They are so sweet and sunny . . . help me to begin afresh, so that I think if the little folks in my Sunday school and on the street knew my secret they would say, Mr. Collyer has been hearing again from Mr. Bland. Of course you will not attain or be perfect until you are a grandsire. . . . Then I shall hear new notes. Seems to me we should be grandfathers before we are fathers and then if we depart this life before we have had it all, we shall have had the best. . . . We are better than usual at the house, a bit more cheerful most times. . . . Have two nice girls, dear friends of our darling, staying with us, and they keep the house bright like birds."

In the summer of this year (1887), Robert Collyer went to California. He preached several times, in San Francisco and elsewhere, to great audiences; once the crowd was so vast that hurried adjournment was taken from the church to a theatre across the way. His experience is described in a blithe letter to Flesher Bland, "Oct. 1887":

"I did have ever such a pleasant journey to the other coast. Stayed five weeks at a lovely country house on the Bay of San Francisco ten miles from the city, and took journeys thence far and wide through the strange new land, spending one week on a journey to the Yosemite, the grandest and most wonderful bit of nature I have ever seen and only to be described by another Shakespere or Milton. Then I went up into Oregon to Portland, where my son Sam lives and prospers—732 miles through the mountains and large fair valleys teeming with fruit and corn, and with five grand snow-peaks shining afar on Portland which I did not see as the forests were afire and shut us in. . . . I also went down the Columbia from Portland 125 miles to the ocean and stayed a day with a friend who has a sort of saw mill camp on the river, interesting as an entrancing book to me. And so came home when I got ready by Idaho, Wyoming and Nebraska. . . . Went also quite through Nevada, and was so fascinated by the Great Desert that, while I had a choice of routes to return equally wonderful, so they said, I elected to

256 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

strike the same desert again to get another look at it. . . . It was the journey of a life-time. There is nothing like it in all my memories. A new life is brooding and being fostered forth over there that will be very noble, I think, and fine. . . .

"Dr. Parker of the City Temple in London was at the church yesterday . . . and stayed to shake hands and say 'I agree with every word you have said, sir,' and other kindly things of the same tenor.⁵ Sermons are coming a little easier than usual and seem to be a little better, but then all old fellows think that of their sermons and rather wonder everybody does not think so. . . . I am just finishing my book, 'Talks to Young Men,' and may send the last Mss. to-day perhaps. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, December 29, 1887:

". . . Had a message (by messenger) from the White House one day, asking me if I would not kindly go with Mrs. Cleveland to Bridgeport where she was to open an institute for working women. She could have

"When I was in New York, I heard the leading Unitarian minister in that city, Dr. Robert Collyer. . . . His prayer was so large, so tender, so intercessory; his visions of divine truth were so noble, so radiant, so hopeful! He was amongst his people as a kind of father-mother, strong, gentle; a prophet whose eyes wondered through eternity; a man of an eloquent tongue, and of generous speech, and a vast conception of things. If some imp had not hissed into my ear, 'This is a Unitarian,' I might have invited him to preach in my pulpit when he came to London."—(Dr. Parker.)

any man, and she said 'Only Robert Collyer.' Think of that now, and I had never seen her, bless her, and we had such a good time. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, March 29, 1888:

". . . It would be wonderfully pleasant to wander up the Dale with you, and here and there as the humour took us, and to hear you preach in the old chapels and see the crowds. Man proposes, however, and you know the rest, and I am shy now of laying plans beyond short spaces. . . .

"We move into the Strathmore the first of May. Mother cannot follow the big house any more—cannot climb stairs except with great trouble. So we have a very nice sunny nest all on one floor, plenty big enough, but I have also taken a large room in the Holland which is used by artists and such people, where I can be quiet and do my work and have plenty of room for my books. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, Fourth o' July, 1888:

"I am a gentleman of leisure. . . . We have taken a house by the sounding sea (Spring Lake, N. J.), and have Mrs. Hosmer with us and her three sons to stay all summer. . . . I have been writing a brief article in the *North American Review*, by invitation of the editor, touching the interesting controversy opened by Henry Field with Mr. Ingersoll, in which Mr. Glad-

258 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

stone has taken a hand. My piece is entitled 'The Bible in the Controversy' . . . and comes in between the great champions, and is an attempt toward the word of reconciliation some one always has to say. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, September 15, 1888:

" . . . I have had a good time reading the new edition of Lamb's 'Letters,' Morley's new 'History of English Literature,' a very valuable work, and some other books including 'John Ward, Preacher,' a striking story by an American writer, and 'Robert Elsmere,' also a story about a parson and his wife. . . . I have also been browsing over this vast 'Cyclopedia of Biblical and other Religious Literature' done by the Methodists and printed by Harper's in 12 big volumes. It is simply amazing in its fulness. . . . 'The Talks to Young Men' has done well. A Mr. Currier wrote me how he saw it lying on a table in a parlour in Australia just now, but I think it has not been reprinted in England."

To Flesher Bland, May Day, 1889:

" . . . We are in a bit of trouble. Mrs. Collyer has had a slight stroke, which has alarmed us sadly. She is better again and has almost got the use of her hand back, but we live now in the shadow and can only *hope* for the best. My sister (Mrs. Martha C. Merritt) from Pudsey keeps house for us now. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, October 23, 1889:

"We have been full of alarm about the dear Mother for some time past, who has been near the gates of death, but is better as I write. . . . We had a consultation on Sunday which gave us comfort so far, but the balance draws easily for death against life, and we know not what a day may bring forth. . . ."

Mrs. Collyer recovered for a time, although sadly crippled and weak. The winter brought illness to Mr. Collyer in the form of a severe attack of grippe. He was at no time confined to his bed or even to the house, but he reports that "it sent a claw deep into my life and lamed me in many ways. But I managed to worry along in some poor fashion. . . . I did not get well until vacation." This vacation was spent in the mountains at Sugar Hill, N. H., and was saddened by the news of the death of his son-in-law, Mr. Hosmer, in Chicago. Then, after the return to the city, came the slow fading of Mrs. Collyer, and her passing on October 21 (1890). "The dear wife of more than 40 years, her children rise up and call her blessed," were the words written by the minister's hand in the church records. A tender tribute was spoken from the Messiah pulpit, and another and fuller one at Unity Church, Chicago, on January 19, 1891.

260 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Collyer had long since recognised and rightly appraised the work of this woman—her good sense, patience, courage, friendliness, supreme devotion to himself, his home, and his chosen work. He knew the fibre which had enabled her to follow him unfalteringly across the seas to a strange and lonely land, to “fare and fend” with him in the grim days when “there was neither food nor money in the house or any prospect of any coming,” to go with him in strange and unfamiliar pathways from the anvil to the pulpit, to meet undaunted the trial of fire and sustain him when his own heart broke beneath the strain. Nature and grace had endowed him richly, but he needed no one to tell him that, without this life-companion, these would not have availed to lift him up. The glory of his days was hers as well as his, and he would have been the last to hide the tale. Beautiful therefore was his spoken tribute, and beautiful also the silent tribute of the after years.

No letter referring directly to the death of Mrs. Collyer is found in his correspondence. One written to Flesher Bland five years later on the death of Mrs. Bland contains this paragraph:

“ . . . It may well be more than you can bear, dear friend. That burden was mine, is mine, and will be to

the end. We say that word, my better half, all along through your fifty and my forty years, but we never grasp the full meaning until they are taken while we are left, and then we know it is the poorer half which lags behind tarrying, and limping, lamed. . . .”

To Flesher Bland, September 29, 1891:

“I thought I would like to lay off, but the summer vacation always cures me, and I am glad to be back. . . . We had a nice summer—lovely valleys and upland farms in beautiful trim, with gardens and orchards foaming with flowers and fruit. I spoke twice in woods meetings, once to 5000 people so they said, and was heard perfectly. Did a good bit of preaching also here and there and enjoyed it, and have come feeling very well. . . . An old friend sent me a root of heather the other day from *our* moor, and I have sent it to the nursery man to see if it will grow. . . .”

To Flesher Bland, March 24, 1892:

“... (I was at) Hamilton, a church where I preached the sermon at the dedication night before last on my way home from Chicago, where I have been to marry my granddaughter—think o’ that now—and preached in my church, I call it mine still, to all it would hold. . . .”

On July 6, 1892, Robert Collyer set sail for Liverpool on the *Teutonic*, accompanied by

262 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Mr. and Mrs. Eastman ("Hattie"), and two of their children, Lucy and Tom. The prime object of the journey was to dedicate a library and free school at Timble, near Otley, the gift of a fellow Yorkshireman, Robinson Gill, a stone merchant of New York. Mr. Gill accompanied the party and shared a state-room with Collyer. The ceremonies of dedication took place according to schedule on August 2.

"Yesterday we had our 'Bee' at Timble, and had the grandest sort of a time. They came from Leeds and Pateley Bridge in carriages galore and astounded the natives, who said 'We've niver seen nowt like this.'"

Collyer gave the address of the occasion on the subject of "Books." Later, on August 23, he formally opened and dedicated a new Museum at Ilkley. Other events of the summer are recorded in an October 7th letter to Flesher Bland.

". . . I did not go abroad—England was good enough for me. Took a lot of time writing those screeds for Timble and Ilkley. . . . Had a lovely time on the south coast—went to Stonehenge and was touched with awe over its grandeur and mystery. To Winchester—and St. Cross. Was the last in a procession 800 years long to claim a mug of beer and a hunk of bread provided for all hands through all time.

. . . Lunched in Canterbury with the good Canon Freemantle and sat next to a Bishop—think of that now, and the Canon took me through his cathedral and told me its splendid story. . . . Preached in Ilkley to more than could get in. Gave Margaret Parratt a bit of a hug for auld lang syne. . . . Stayed with a vicar north of York in whose church porch are curious grooves made where they used to sharpen their arrows before gunpowder came along. . . . Went up to Burn-sall . . . and made believe to preach in your stead. . . . Picked up a book in Leeds about Sedburg and find you there in state and station. . . . Dear me, what a good time I did have wandering by hill and dale. I wonder if I shall ever go again. . . .”

To Flesher Bland, November 29, 1892:

“. . . I am editing another and no doubt the last (book) of this kind, ‘Things New and Old,’ the sermons which came out this year as tracts, and six more. Sermons come slow now, but now and then there is one I like, or I do not like it but the folks do, and so I keep at it in some sort, but have got a burden . . . which will master me one of these days. . . .”

To Flesher Bland, June 28, 1893:

“. . . I am glad of my rest, and tire easily. But went to the May meetings in Boston, where I read a discourse before the Berry St. Conference—a very old

264 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

institution of ministers only—that I called ‘In Autobiography.’ . . . I made three speeches also and preached twice coming home. Not tired after all, so I guess there is reserve power left still. . . .”

To Flesher Bland, October 31, 1893:

“ . . . I am well as usual and my work does not come hard this fall. It seems to be given me what I shall say rather more than usual. You should have gone to the World’s Parliament of Religions and the White City. I was there two weeks and enjoyed my visit. Did I tell you I had a nice note from the Archbishop of Canterbury? Canon Freemantle of that ilk wrote me his Grace would be glad to receive a copy of ‘Things New and Old’ from my hand, all the more because we are both Yorkshiremen. . . .”

To Master Norman Collyer (aged 13), December 14, 1893:

“The Strathmore,

“New York, Dec. 14, 1893.

“*Dear Norman:*

“I was so glad to hear from Mamma how well you are doing in the school so that I almost wished it was me, but then I was lazy when I was a boy, so you see it could not be me. But it will be a great joy to me to think of you as likely to make a fine scholar and a perfect American gentleman when you are grown up! And you



ROBERT COLLYER IN 1893
From a Photograph taken at Rowayton, Conn., by George C. Marvin—A Summer Idyl!



can be both on a farm or in a forge if that is what you like, as well as in a bank or in the Senate or the White House. But do not study your head off, my Laddie. Take plenty of play—run, jump—Washington was the best jumper in Westmoreland county—play ball, skate if you can get any ice, swim like a fish, dive like a diver duck, be out doors all you can, don't eat green apples when you can get 'em ripe, and love God and mind your books every time. It is soon going to be Christmas and New Year's. I hope you will see as many as your old grandpa and he is well at 70. Tell Papa and Mamma I was very glad to have a telegram from them on my birthday and to have a beautiful letter from Mamma just before.

"And you will want to buy some little present for them and for dear Grandma Dewey as well as for yourself—so I enclose you a little money to spend as you choose and send my love to you all as—"

To Flesher Bland, January 4, 1894:

"... I sent you a paper with an account of the Reception they gave me when I came of age. It was lovely as blush roses, with the roses, for two great baskets came with 70 in each of them, and no end of flowers beside, so that we were 'mooed out' with flowers. Also books! Likewise articles for use and beauty, and a stack of letters and poems I will have bound in a volume."

266 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

This seventieth birthday celebration⁶ was made a memorable and lovely occasion by the people of the Church of the Messiah and their invited guests. Beyond all careful preparation, it proved to be such a spontaneous outpouring of devotion and goodwill as come to few men anywhere in the period of their own life-time. A large, representative and merry group of people were received by Mr. Collyer in the chapel, and then assembled in the church for the evening's exercises. John White Chadwick, master of ceremonies, began by reading a letter and sonnet from Minot J. Savage, of Boston, and followed this with the reading of his own incomparable poem,

"You dear old Robert whom we love so well."

As he finished with the line,

"God bless you! and let all the people say
Amen!"

Mr. Collyer leaped to his feet and, in sheer delight, kissed his beloved "John" on the cheek, before the whole assembly! Rev. H. M. Morehouse, Secretary of the local Unitarian conference, read letters of congratulation which had

⁶December 8, 1893.

been received from friends and associates near and far. The names of those who thus contributed made a noble list, including William H. Baldwin, Charles Dudley Warner, William C. Gannett, Charles H. Eaton, Heber Newton, Charles Gordon Ames, William H. Furness, Kate Douglas Wiggin, Joseph May, Mrs. James T. Fields, and others only less distinguished. Then came speeches from Samuel A. Eliot, minister of the Church of the Saviour, Brooklyn, and Merle St. C. Wright, minister of the Lenox Avenue Unitarian Church, New York, and a final word of tender reminiscence and abounding gratitude from "our Robert." In a sermon preached to his congregation on the anniversary, which sounded less like the rustle of autumn leaves than the vernal song of birds and the fragrance of spring flowers, Collyer spoke his joy that "the dream of three-score years and ten has come true. I would not exchange my lot," he said, "with any human creature I know. Nor would I have chosen any other seventy years for my life. None of the great eras of the past would I have exchanged for the present one. There is none so beautiful in the way of great accomplishment. I am glad to look back on all the years, glad that I was born

268 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

in the good mother land, England, and glad that I was born again in this beautiful America."

The problem of his continued connection with the Church of the Messiah had for some time, now, been in the forefront of Robert Collyer's mind. During the first five or six years of his ministry in New York, he had been active and vigorous, and had been rewarded by crowded congregations and a large measure of outside public attention. In 1886, however, we find him reporting to the society his concern about the evening services. "You do not seem to care for them any longer as a rule," he writes; "I can seldom count more than a score of my own people present, and on one Sunday evening could count only four. So if this should become a settled custom, I trust you will not wonder if I should finally ask you whether it will not be best to follow the lead of All Souls Church and suspend these services. I am not ready to say this now, because the habit is deep and strong in me of trying to preach twice every Sunday. I don't blame you in the least for only attending one service who love your homes so well. It is simply a question of use to the church and of my own power to hold out well, now that I am turned three-score." Very shortly after this statement came the death of his daughter, Annie. Refer-

ring to this event and its consequences to himself, in his next Report (February 14, 1887), Collyer said, "I felt when I resumed my duties that I should not be able to hold two services for a time, and was at once released from the evening service, while the question was left in my own hands when we should begin again. We have not done this," he continued, "but I quite hope to be able to do something Sunday evening after our vacation." The services, however, were never resumed; from this time on, the church was open only for the regular morning service.

In his Report for 1889, marking the completion of a decade in New York, we find Collyer expressing his "regret that (he) has not been able to serve (the people) to a better and finer purpose." This *apologia* now appears with unvarying uniformity in the reports submitted annually after this date. In 1892, he says, "While the work given me to do has been done with a willing heart, I can only regret that I have not been able to do very much better. But we must all be aware of the truth that the last years in a minister's life are seldom the best years for a church when the fires of life begin to abate." In 1894, he writes, "My work as your minister has been and must be subject to the regret that I cannot do more and better both in the pulpit, the

270 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

parish and the city, but this is now an old story while the truth remains, and in your loyalty you have saved me so far as you were able from the trouble and pain of it, for which I have to thank you with all my heart." In 1895, he repeats, "Looking back through the twelve months, I can only feel the old regret that I have not been able to make a fuller proof of my ministry in the work to which I was called."

It is evident from these statements, and certain others contained in his letters, that Robert Collyer was no longer feeling himself equal to the tasks laid upon him by the demands of his ministry. He was feeling again, and much more seriously, the weariness and strain which had come upon him in his last years in Chicago, and for the relief of which, among other things, he had sought the new field of labour in New York. For a time after this change, as we have seen, his powers resumed all their wonted buoyancy and vigour. These early years at the Church of the Messiah were among the busiest, happiest, most successful and most beneficent of his life. With the death of Annie, however, there came a definite and final change. He never wholly rallied from this great sorrow. The old feeling which seized him after the great fire, was back, and this time to stay. He yearned for release

from his duties, and began to dream of a period of idleness in England. His years, also, began to weigh upon him their unescapable burden. A slackening of his activity, a waning of his powers, became perceptible to himself and others; and in the latter case were definitely registered in a steady decline in attendance at Sunday morning services and in general public interest in the church and its minister. Nothing is more greatly to Robert Collyer's credit at this sad crisis in his career, than his calm refusal to close his eyes to what he saw to be the facts. With a serenity and good cheer which speak volumes as to the essential soundness of this man's heart, he repeatedly pointed out to his people what was going on, and advised them to take appropriate action.

In his Report for 1890, he charged the people "to mind the church first of all, and above all, and not to mind me when you see it is time for me to give place to a younger and better man." At the time of his seventieth birthday celebration, he attempted to resign. In a letter to Flesher Bland, January 4, 1894, he says:

"... I made up my mind to resign my charge here, and be as those that are at ease in Zion. But they cannot be made to see what I see, that they need

272 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

a younger and abler man. The men said, No, and the women made speeches, the first time in the history of the church, to more than the same purpose. They say I must have an assistant, a curate, but I must do the preaching, and so here I am listed, I suppose, for life, and there is no help for it. No whole year now, as I have dreamed this good while, in England, to see the primroses and daffodils come out. To stay at the Laund perhaps and be filled with delight over the small meadow below, golden with the cowslips, and hear Wharfe in all weathers, and who knows what beside, the sky-lark song, the black-bird and throstle. All a happy dream. I do not fret. 'Mother' always said I should not quit work while I could stand in my lot, and 'Mother' was a wise woman."

The idea of securing an assistant did not seem to work out, for the reason stated in the minister's Report for December, 1894. "A year ago," writes Collyer, "you suggested I should have an assistant, but no steps have been taken on my part to find one, for this reason first, that you do not want him to preach much or at all, and second that so far as any other work is concerned, I do not see what in the world I can find for another man to do except to start a new church somewhere between this and Harlem." A more drastic suggestion, better calculated to give the minister the relief that he so eagerly craved and

the people the leadership that he felt they deserved, is hinted at in a letter to Flesher Bland of October 2, 1895:

" . . . I am in good case to all seeming this fall. There was a fine opportunity this summer to call another man, Mr. Savage. . . . He was ready to come and I met the Board of Trustees and urged the call, offering to take any sort of back-seat for the welfare of the church, pleading age and general stupidity and I know not what beside, but they said, 'No, there is only one man in the church who is not entirely satisfied with our minister and that is himself.' "

Robert Collyer had found his man, however, and not for a moment was he to be deterred from his purpose. He had first met Minot J. Savage in the early '70s in Chicago, whither the younger man had come to take charge of the Third Unitarian Church. In a letter to James Redpath, of the famous lecture bureau, he wrote on December 3, 1874:

"My friend and brother, M. J. Savage, will be a valuable man in your line, if you can give him a start. He took out here like hot cakes and butter. . . ."

Later on, in 1876, Collyer received a call to the Church of the Unity, in Boston. This he de-

274 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

clined at once; but in his reply he referred to Savage as "the man you want," and thus prepared the way for that remarkable ministry of twenty years which made the name of M. J. Savage world-famous. Always Collyer rejoiced in the great success of his protégé, and now, when his own career was ending, looked to him to take up his burden at the Church of the Messiah. In a letter to Flesher Bland, December 24, 1895, he tells the story of events:

" . . . We are looking in hope for the coming of Mr. Savage from Boston to take the stroke oar in our church as associate pastor with me. I could not feel it was good for the church to keep on as we have done. This is my 73rd year in life and the 17th in my ministry here. I said to Mr. Savage a few years ago that when I got through I would love to have him take my place. So at the annual meeting Dec. 5th I brought up the question, having seen Mr. Savage and found he was ready to come if we wanted him, and he could get away from Boston. The result was a committee which went to confer with him, and then a meeting of the Society and 'a call' ⁷ quite unanimous, with the proviso that I should not take a back seat as I intended, but stand with him shoulder to shoulder, and preach as I was able. . . . The church is entirely of one heart to the last man and woman that I shall never leave them

⁷ On December 18, 1895.

but die in my nest, or ever be troubled in any way about ways and means to live. Mr. Savage is the ablest preacher now in the denomination, and my dear friend of many years, so you may be sure I am very happy. . . .”

The problem of diverting Mr. Savage from his great ministry at the Church of the Unity, in Boston, encountered difficulties not anticipated. By another year, however, it was solved; and in the fall of 1896, the joint ministry of these two distinguished men began. In a letter to Mrs. Cohen, dated October 28, Mr. Collyer tells of the arrangement.

“. . . You will see I have an associate now, the one man in all the world I wanted. I have preached twice and Dr. Savage twice since the church was opened, but the rule we think may be for him to preach three Sunday mornings in the four, and open the church for evening services of which I will take three, but as yet we have not decided on what is best to be done. . . .”

The official Report to the church in December, 1896, bore joyful testimony to what had transpired. “A year ago,” wrote Collyer, “the question came up of a helper in this ministry, which was solved at length by your call to my dear friend of many years, Dr. Minot J. Savage, to

276 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

become associate minister with me. The one man in all the world as I believed who could meet the demand of the Church of the Messiah. . . . My joy is more than I shall tell in your minister and my brother. You have found him, as I have long known him, a most noble preacher. You will find him, also, a most noble man."

CHAPTER XV

LOOKING TOWARD SUNSET

1897-1912

"—I glance toward my sun's setting, and remember the saying, 'The young may die soon, but the old must.' Still I am glad to stay so long as I may, while in some rare moments I must confess I feel some touch of eagerness to go when I am held captive by the vision of my beloved waiting for me, my very own and so many more, where mortality is swallowed up by life."—R. C. in "Some Memories," page 248.

Robert Collyer began the new year (1897) in high spirits. To Jasper Douthit on January 19, he writes:

"The blessing on the New Year came all right and was right welcome. . . . It finds me well and hearty, with a lighter burden on my old back, which is not yet bent, through the grace of my church and the help of my associate minister, the only man I ever wanted to take the pastorate when I must retire. They would not let me retire or take a lower seat, but made the chair wide enough for two without crowding."

278 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Dr. Savage bore now the brunt of the preaching and the parish work. Collyer was regularly in the pulpit, took his share of the service, and once a month at least preached the sermon. But this taxed his strength but little, especially as he quite easily satisfied himself, and his people, by preaching not a new but an old sermon. These discourses had a fragrance like that of old wine to those who had long dwelt with him, and to those who knew him not, they were as fresh and new as ever.¹ As time went on, however, he found the burden of his ministry increasing rather than lightening, for very shortly after his arrival in New York, Dr. Savage became a semi-invalid, and did his work under the serious handicap of ill-health. The year 1899 was a trying one, with the associate minister unable to enter the pulpit, and Robert Collyer manfully preaching in his stead. "I have done what I could," he writes in his annual Report, "not to fill his (Savage's) place, but to take the services and the sermon, feeling all the while that after all your old minister might be the best man for this work, while no word or whisper has come to me

¹ Sometimes, however, there was a protest. "Dr. Collyer," said a certain woman on a certain Sunday after service, "this is the third time I have heard that sermon!" "Ah, my dear," replied the old man, with his most benignant smile, "how lucky ye are."

that you would fain have another man for these Sundays, and I thank you for this." Another year saw improvement in Dr. Savage's condition; but always there was the possibility, and sometimes the necessity, of taking the Sunday service at short notice, and for years Collyer never went to the church on a Sunday morning without a sermon ready for emergency in his pocket.

Invitations to preach in other churches were frequent, and in the beginning were frequently accepted. Later on, however, he usually declined. Ever after the fateful Sunday in 1899 when he was away and the congregation dismissed because of his associate's inability at the last moment to enter the pulpit, he felt it his duty to be on hand as a kind of "reserve." Furthermore, a very real feeling began to creep into his heart, that his day was past. Again he was refusing to blink the fact of waning powers and decaying strength. Even as early as March 4, 1897, when he was still accepting invitations, he writes to his daughter, Mrs. Hosmer:

"They did invite me to preach that sermon, but I said 'No,' because I could not say 'Ay.' Also to preach the Baccalaureate Sermon at the University, Lincoln, Nebraska, later on, but I said 'No' for the same reason, and also there because I was not the man for such a job. . . ."

280 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

There were some places, however, where he was always glad to go, if possible, at least once a year. The church in Washington, D. C., was one; John White Chadwick's church in Brooklyn was another; and always without fail, at apple-blossom time, the University at Ithaca, where a clanging bell and a rude horse-shoe brought memories of other days. Boston also thronged to hear him, and on occasion, though not as frequently as in other days, Unity Church, Chicago.

His home was now quieter than had been its wont in many years, for the brave days of unlimited hospitality were over. "Aunt Martha," who had taken the "Mother's" place as house-keeper in 1889, died lamented of all who knew her on April 26, 1895. "We miss the blessed sister," was Collyer's word to Flesher Bland.* "On the Sunday after her burial I preached from the text 'Jesus Loved Martha,' and we shall put that on the stone by her grave." The sister's place was efficiently taken, however, by a niece from England, Mrs. John E. Roberts, a strong, wholesome, hearty woman, full of the virtues of the Yorkshire tribe. The other members of the household were Mr. Roberts, and "Rob," the inseparable companion of his father, cared for

* In a letter dated June 26, 1895.

through many years and now himself caring in love and tenderness for the older man.

Collyer's days were now very much as those of his "dear old mother," when he rejoiced that at last "she had that spell of resting in the sun before she was . . . borne away." Work was comparatively light, engagements few. The morning usually found him trudging down Broadway to his study in the Holland Building, just opposite the Metropolitan Opera House. The tenants of this building had changed in character since the days of his original occupancy of his room in 1886. Artists had been succeeded by actors and detectives, studios transformed into vaudeville offices, secret service agencies, etc. It was all the same, however, to the stout, white-haired old man, smiling from under his broad-brimmed black-felt hat, and thumping up the two long flights of stairs with his heavy cane. All men were his friends, and his own soul, with its memories of heather moors and blustering lake-shores, was his perpetual landscape. Here at his desk he would write his letters, turn the pages of newspaper or magazine, revise the text of some old sermon, or take from the shelves of the ceiling-high bookcases which lined three sides of the spacious room, some beloved volume and

282 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

lose himself in its familiar pages. New books were not neglected, but old ones were loved best.

" . . . He was a wise man who said, 'When they tell me I ought to read some new book, I read an old one.' And so was Dr. Furness, who said, 'I do not worry about the best new books—they are sure to drop in on me within a year.'—Have you read Kipling's 'Seven Seas'—how very good it is! I have inserted his lovely autograph letter to me in mine. Have just begun Parker's 'Seats of the Mighty.' It begins well, a copy from his hands with a nice inscription." ⁸

Afternoons were spent leisurely at home, or, if the weather was favourable, in visits to the more intimate friends of the parish. The Century Club was a welcome lounging place now and then. Always on the first Monday of each month, he lunched with his fellow-ministers of the liberal churches in New York and vicinity, and joined in their discussions with wise word, friendly jest, or happy reminiscence. In the summer he was at Mrs. H. P. Farnham's hospitable home at Dublin, New Hampshire, with H. H. Rogers at Fairhaven, with Mrs. James T. Fields at Manchester, or, as in later days, at Gloucester in the care of his daughter, Mrs. Hosmer. The years passed easily, with frequent

⁸ Letter dated March 4, 1897,

joys, occasional sorrows. Sometimes a certain wistfulness would possess him, when he seemed to be thinking of other days and departed friends. Thus, to Flesher Bland, April 1, 1897:

"... I know your heart by my own, wanting to say not seldom with our great poet,

'But O for the touch of a vanished hand
And the sound of a voice that is still,'

for at times I am very lonesome. But the time is short now for you and me. We have had our day, and it has been a good day, far better for me than my deserving, but I think not for you, who was as Paul's dear son Timothy, trained in the holy ways by holy men and women. . . ."

Abounding health, however, was usually matched by unfailing spirits, attuned to the key of present living; and always there was a radiant glory of old age which became a thing to talk and dream about, as it deepened into richer and rarer beauty with the years.

To Mrs. Hosmer, May 3, 1897:

"... We have ten, a family now, and I am talking of asking more salary, and five more coming. So

284 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

what do you think of that? Still, as the additions are canaries newly fledged or in the egg, we may be able to get along. Anyhow we will see, for I do not like to bother the Trustees! . . .

"Have been to Cornell a month before my time, because I must go to the May meetings in Boston this year, and am down for a sermon in Tremont Temple, . . . with Mr. Hale to conduct the services. It is an innovation and I am nervous as a cat about it. . . ."

In the summer of 1897, Collyer went to Canada, to visit his old friend, Flesher Bland. How the heart warms to think of these two together! He writes on his return, August 31:

"I am here safe and sound. It is a far cry from Montreal to Boston . . . but I had good company, some gentlemen who had been to the great meeting at Toronto and among them Professor Lowell, the author of that radiant book on Mars which leaves you in no doubt about the red star being inhabited or that they are very fine creatures indeed who have constructed those wonderful canals. So we had a nice visit all the way down, as he also smokes a good cigar. . . . Dear old comrade, I had a beautiful and memorable time. The glow of it will stay in my heart always."

A later letter (September 15, 1897) to Mrs. Hosmer, tells more of this summer:

" . . . Stayed with Mr. Bland almost a week and had a lovely visit. He is growing feeble, but is the same fine old Methodist as he was a fine young Methodist 60 years ago. I made a brief address in the church on the Sunday evening, and on a week night lectured on Robert Burns. Returned to Boston and went for a week to West Townsend . . . and one day to the Shaker settlement at Shirley to see my old friend John Whiteley, the head of the commune. . . . It was a pleasant visit; we dined with them, I lotted on a Shaker dinner good but queer. It was the same as a body's own, good, wholesome and plentiful. They are old people now, and few in number, but very nice, and the women wear pretty Quaker caps. I congratulated Sister Mary Ann on her gown—not Quaker. N. B. Sister Mary Ann *was* Mrs. John Whiteley, but when you turn Shaker you live what they call the angelic life—and I don't. Still the dear old faces are peaceful, and brother Whiteley told me with a quiet chuckle that one of his sons runs a theatre. I will not even imagine that he gives Sister Mary Ann a kiss and a hug now and then on the sly, or squeezes her hand when they dance before the Lord o' Sundays, but if she was my Mary Ann blood would be thicker than Mother Ann's dogma who founded the sect. . . . Then I went for a week to Manchester-by-the-Sea. . . . Preached for the elect in the small chapel down the hill, and read Robert Burns."

To Mrs. James T. Fields, November 9, 1897:

286 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

“ . . . I got home last evening from Chicago, where I have been preaching four Sundays in the old church of my love and 21 years of my life. They were much cast down, so I went out to cheer 'em up a bit, and strengthen their hearts, wherein I trust I succeeded. I was busy as a 'skep' of bees. . . . It is good to get back into the old den. . . .”

To Mrs. Cohen, November 22, 1897:

“You should not sleep in church, that will never do in the world, or take pillows there, that is worse, for it presumes the purpose. When some one said to some other, ‘Where does Greeley worship,’ the answer was ‘He sleeps at Chapin’s.’ . . . Well, all this if it had come in time might have turned the scale for Oakland. I could not come. I belong right here and shall stay, I hope, until I die. Wrote Wendte at once it was impossible. . . .”

To Flesher Bland, January 12, 1898:

“This brings the good wishes for another happy new year to you and the household. . . . The year opens pleasantly here. Everybody is well and the church prospers. Mr. Savage has challenged great attention and has a good hearing. He is as radical in statement as—Wesley was with that grand gospel of free grace all those years ago! . . . Am reading three big books—the new Life of Tennyson, the story of the house of

Blackwood, whence comes the great magazine, and the history of the Benedictines—and have finished the ‘Life and Times of St. Cyprian,’ a noble piece of work. It is very pleasant to find so much time to read. I think I may grow somewhat intelligent if I keep on. . . .”

To Mrs. James T. Fields, February 22, 1898:

“. . . I have a cold so heavy that for a week I did not go out and missed my Sunday service, the only time for such a reason in these 18 years, and the second in 39 years we began in Chicago. . . .”

To Mrs. Cohen, February 24, 1898:

“. . . I was glad to find your cheerful spirit in your word about yourself and the bairns. Your life now is hid in the two generations, but especially as mine seems to be in the grand bairns. One has been staying with us two days, the Yale student. . . . I gave him the fine new edition of ‘John Halifax, Gentleman,’ and hid a greenback cunningly in the middle, so if he does not read the book he will not find the greenback. . . .”

To Flesher Bland, April 4, 1898:

“. . . I write this especially to say good-bye which is the abbreviated old English, you know, for ‘God be wi’ you.’ I shall sail on the 16th, D. V., on the North

288 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

German Lloyd Steamship *Aller* for Naples. . . . They have invited me to preach the annual sermon before the British and Foreign U. A. on the first of June, a very great honour. But I have had to decline because that would shrieve me of two weeks on the Continent. Also I did preach that sermon 27 years ago, but have got to the time when an old man 'fears that which is high,' so I will be low. . . ."

Collyer sailed on the appointed day—his seventh trip to Europe, but his first to the Mediterranean. His journey took him north from Naples to Rome, Florence, Venice, and Milan, across the Simplon Pass into Switzerland, on to Paris, and thence early in June to England. He returned in September on the *Teutonic*, after a five months' absence.

To "Dear Laddie and Lassie (Mr. and Mrs. Wilmot), Saturday, A. M.":

"This is to say that I am well and hearty. . . . We passed San Miguel, the biggest of the Azores, yesterday morning, a lovely island lying fair in the sun. . . . Saw the folk at work in the fields through the glass—the whole island is green from the emerald sea to the cedars and pines, clothed in verdure to the very crown of the old volcanoes. . . . I am to preach to-morrow morning. I wish you were here to back me. . . ."

To Mrs. Hosmer, May 7, 1898:

"This leaves me well and in Rome. . . . I had a note to the Archbishop I left at his residence. So he came to see me and gave me a greeting as hearty as the heart could desire, not the shadow of church lines anywhere about him, only a frank welcome as man to man standing on the same earth and the same level. . . . I have seen the Rome which has lived so long in my imagination—St. Peter's, the Coliseum, the Catacombs, the Appian Way, The Tiber, St. Angelo which was Hadrian's Tomb, the Vatican, ever so many churches and museums beside. . . . As I write this Julia Ward Howe sends a note asking me to lunch tomorrow, and I will go after church. . . . The word has gone forth that I am a bishop. The officers in the house wondered, as I hear, to see a Protestant bishop and Catholic Archbishop meet as we did and sit down for a chat. . . . It was very welcome news we had from Manila. . . . The Ambassador feels very cheerful almost at the prospect of an early termination of the war. . . ." ⁴

To Mrs. James T. Fields, from London, June 6, 1898:

"I am here and well, staying with Sir Edwin and Lady Lawrence. . . . Yesterday I took the communion service for Mr. Herford at Hampstead, and preached

⁴ The Spanish-American War, 1898.

290 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

last evening at Highgate. Shall preach next Sunday at the Essex church, and then shall have kept my promise to the churches. . . .”

To Mrs. James T. Fields, June 18, 1898:

“I go to Leeds on Thursday, and am eager to go. Sir Edwin and Lady Lawrence are the very heart of loving kindness, and I dwell in Marble Halls where Gladstone dwelt ten years, but ‘laws a massy,’ what’s marble halls in London to my sister’s house in Leeds, ‘saay’? . . .”

To Mrs. H. P. Farnham, from Leeds, June 30, 1898:

“This is my sister’s house on the rise of Beeston Hill, with Leeds below full of smoke and grime, but dear old Leeds all the same, where my folks came to live 59 years ago. My father’s dust lies in the old church yard, my mother’s in the pretty cemetery on the hill. There was no cemetery when my father was buried 30 years and 3 days before my mother died. She remembered the day as she lay waiting for the angel, but my sisters did not until she told them. Both names are on the stone. . . . I came to London from Paris where my brother and son came to meet me from Angers, and we spent four days all together there in very pleasant fashion. . . . My journey from Naples to Paris was also very pleasant, thanks in

good part to my courier, Max, who took all possible care of me. He told no end of yarns about my high dignity in the church, so that notes would come addressed to The Very Reverend Bishop, etc., though I warned him this was not my title, but being himself a Catholic, when Archbishop Keane came to see me in Rome and held out both hands in welcome and we sat down for a long chat in the garden, and . . . the dinner our Ambassador gave me in the Palace with a big P, it was no use assuring Max I was not a bishop. . . . We took the Simplon Pass at Domodossola. It was the journey of a life-time. The snow when we struck the summits of the Pass was three feet on the level and six to ten in the drifts, but it was a glorious day full of sunshine which lay golden on the vast white snow-clad mountains white with a glory I shall never see again. There were relays of men cutting a road through the drifts, so that we were only hindered by the snow-slides. These came down twice, and we missed one which would have buried us by only five minutes, which was another mercy, but would have been dug out, so Max said. . . . I would not have gone over if I had foreseen what I *hind* see now, but am ever so glad I did it. . . . I preached here in our noble church to the largest crowd ever seen they say in the building, and gave them 'The Morning Song of the Creation.' . . ."

To Mrs. Hosmer, August 21, 1898:

". . . This last week I have been busy. Made the memorial address for Robinson Gill at Timble, and the

292 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

next day was at Fewston. . . . Mrs. Fields, Miss Jewett⁵ and her sister Mary came down from London to be at Timble, and then returned to Ilkley, where I joined them. We got a splendid team and went up the Dale 12 miles to Burnsall, a lovely ride. Master Bland, an old friend of many years, keeps a sort of hotel, so I telegraphed we would lunch there. But no thank you! *This* was an event! They sent some miles for a quarter of lamb, had a plum pudding also and pies and other dainties, cream and what they call 'sike like' in the dale. . . . Master Bland is a poet and is much given to reeling off his poems at very great length, but I warned the ladies, so they laid plots to head him off when there was a chance and yet to please him meanwhile. He is down on the Vicar, poor fellow. I mean poor Vicar. They quarrel like cat and dog. He took us round the vicarage with great pains, so that the Vicar might see us no doubt, and then he will get word to him somehow of his distinguished company. It was all very funny when you know what the fine old yeoman was up to. . . . I shall preach next Sunday in the big Methodist Church, and that will be 'nuts,' for it means that I am taken into the fellowship of the old mother church again. . . ."

To Flesher Bland, October 3, 1898:

"Here I am home again after five months' absence, a bit tired but otherwise as well as ever. . . . I preached

⁵ Sarah Orne Jewett, the novelist.

as you will have heard at Addingham, and stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Gill. Went with Mrs. Gill to Doublestone on a lovely afternoon and drank in the glory of the land from that bench on the rock in the door yard, and drank tea—a good old-fashioned Yorkshire ‘drink-in’.

We went up through the green lanes a mile on the road toward Ilkley. . . . I preached in the (Methodist) chapel (at Ilkley) on a Sunday evening to a noble audience which filled the church and all the chairs and benches they could pile in, and returned the week after to give them my lecture on Burns. . . . Well, dear old comrade, nothing in all the five months has given me greater delight than this, that the old mother church should take me in her arms and give me a good hug. It was just what I longed for, but did not hope for, so here I am like the patriarch, ‘old and satisfied.’ . . .”

To Samuel Collyer and his wife, October 13, 1898:

“Dear Son and Daughter:

“I had heard that Mother Dewey was no more with you, the dear good saint and one of the sweetest women I have ever known. And I was sure you would do whatever love can do, all of you, to help her in the last days as she would help you. And now her benediction will abide on the homes and be with you always while you will think of her in the blessed home with Father and Jennie and all the kith and kin.

“I had a lovely visit to the old world, but am still a

294 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

bit tired for it was a strenuous journey for one of my age. Uncle Tommy came to see me in Paris with his son Robert and stayed the best part of a week at a nice hotel where I stayed 20 years ago. He is lame of an arm and not well generally but was cheerful and wanted to know all about Sammy, returning to that over and over. He has retired from the factory and Robert his son takes his place. He walks three miles each fine day out of the town and stops twice for a glass of wine and a pipe. He is well off, has enough to live on, occupies half the house and has his meals with the children. Let me hear from you soon."

To Mrs. H. P. Farnham, Christmastide, December 28, 1898:

"The Audubon is a treasure to have and to hold. No other book could have been quite so welcome. I spent a morning with the volumes this fall and said, Sometime I will buy them. I have always loved the man, but now shall dwell with him and we shall hold many a communion together. Read 77 pages yesterday and shall hold him to my heart all the more now, and bless the giver always. . . ."

To Mrs. Samuel Collyer, January 26, 1899:

"Dear Daughter:

"Your lovely card came to greet us—thanks for that same. It found me in durance with la grippe and con-

fined to the house for a good two weeks, the longest imprisonment of my whole lifetime. La grippe takes away all taste and smell, so that the Christmas dinner might have been anything else, but the boys (Mrs. Hosmer's) were here from Yale and had a very nice time punishing the roast beef. I am better and about my work as usual. Have more to do indeed than usual, for Mr. Savage is down with the nuisance now, worse than I had it, so I have to take his turns, and I go to Boston to-morrow, and Mr. Hale (Edward Everett Hale) comes here for a change. We were glad to hear you were all well and in good heart out there in the region of the mountains. I would love to see you all in the home, but I should miss the dear old saint (Mrs. Collyer's mother). Mrs. Hosmer is here on a month's visit, half to Hattie (Mrs. Joe Eastman) and half to us, and *us* have her now to our great delight. We all grow young again and live on Chicago Avenue and La Salle Avenue in turns. Robert is very well this winter, and last evening made his first speech as President of the Unity Club, where I lectured on Robert Burns, that being his, R. B.'s, birthday. He prepared a speech and then didn't make it but said something else. They had Scotch music on the zither—do you know zithers and Scotch songs—and refreshments, but I did not stay for those. I came home in the Eastman carriage and went to bed like a good boy at half past ten. Hattie and her household are very well. Norman says he will go to West Point and be a soldier; Tom wants to go to a school I think in Concord. Annie

296 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

takes care of Norman. She is the little mother. Lucy just now is deep in the story of Hale the spy who said "If I had another life I would give it for my country," when they were head on to hang him. We usually go up there to tea on Sunday, Robert and I, but last Sunday they came down, Father, Mother, Lucy and Tom."

To Mrs. Fields, February 28, 1899:

". . . The new Lamb letters are all Lamb-like—the volume was sent to me from England. One of them is among his best or two indeed—but especially the one on Jeremy Taylor, full of a lovely insight and estimate of the matchless Divine with a big D. The volume is well worth your reading for his sake and our Saint Charles, *his* sake also. . . ."

To Jasper Douthit, April 29, 1899:

". . . Mr. Savage is still a sick man. I am standing guard over the pulpit. When I first began to wag my pow in a pulpit 50 years ago this summer, the old miller in our small town said, 'They will mak a spare rail o' thee, and theu will hev to fill a sight o' gaps before thee's through, lad!' Well, I began to fill them then, and here I am filling them so near the end, but it's all right, and I am glad to be the spare rail. I had a sore bout with the grippe as the new year stole in, and was confined to the house two weeks, but am now quite well for an old fellow. But when Brother Savage gets

1674 Broadway

New York Feb 5 - 1899

Dear Friend

I should leave my head if it was
Loose my heart I did leave Thanks for the slippers
I like all ones There are a pair of slippers my second
best kids on the table on the hall Will you kindly
send them in an envelope and that will be all and
I will try to amend my ways I fear my memory is
fast fading for I had a nice journey home ward The
fine train is very nice and there is a smoking
palace car Every body seemed glad to see me
and I have given them all home from kind messages

Dear me what a lovely visit this was and
how I shall enjoy it all winter

Yours always, Harry and Bertha
Robert Galtzer

FACSIMILE OF LETTER
Addressed to Mrs. J. T. Fields



2



out of the woods I shall shout Hallelujah so that perhaps you can hear me in Shelbyville, for then I shall see my heart's desires. . . ."

To Jasper Douthit, August 8, 1899:

"I have been watching over my son these ten or twelve weeks with no heart for anything beside, else I should have written something for the *Register*. The old trouble is on him again in a very bad shape. He has had six operations. I brought him here (Gloucester) for the cool weather and the salt sea. . . ."

To Mrs. Cohen, January 15, 1900:

". . . I am reading the new life of Millais, a lovely bit of work about a lovely man, and the Life of Mrs. Oliphant is waiting, the best to me of all the modern story-tellers."

To Jasper Douthit, April 8, 1900:

". . . I shall be ? miles nearer to you the last week in this month. Am going out to Lazenby's Installation over the dear old church in Chicago, and take Cornell on my way home on the 6th of May. I am well on in my 77th year, you know, and by good rights should not take long journeys. Rob stands guard over me . . . but he gives in on the Chicago

298 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

question because that is not a may be but a must be. . . ."

To "Dear Norman," his grandson, November 19, 1900:

"Dear Norman:

"I hear from father and mother that you have made up your mind to work your passage through the University, and want to help you until they are able to do this as I hope they will be by and by. It is a brave resolution but may interfere with your studies or your health, so I have been anxious and asked your mother to tell me how you fared so far and her letter came on Saturday. It confirms my fear that the burden will be more than you should bear, so I enclose a check for fifty dollars. You have done so well so far that I am proud of you, and feel sure you will do well right along, and all the better because you are so far free from care as this will free you. Father thinks he will be in funds before very long, but if he is not I will stand by you. So go ahead, my Lad, and let me know how you are getting along from time to time."

To Mrs. Cohen, January 15, 1901:

"This note finds and will leave me well if I hold on one hour until I drop it into the box. . . . Robin also is quite well now. . . . The home goes on just the

same, Bertha⁶ takes good care of us. . . . The church flourishes amain. I preach in my turn and help all round. Mr. Savage is almost well and has missed no turn since we opened the church in the fall. . . . You have read 'David Harum.' 'Eben Holden' is also good and of the same brand. . . ."

To Jasper Douthit, February 2, 1901:

" . . . Mr. Savage is very much better. He has taken all his turns since October, and is gaining in strength and courage. The church prospers, and is entirely at one. I take my fourth Sunday and the services on his Sundays except the Lesson, and also look after the Sunday school, so I am busy and happy. . . ."

On February 26, 1901, Robert Collyer was once again visited by the calamity of fire. He describes the experience in a letter to Mrs. Fields two days later:

" . . . The alarm of fire came like a bolt from the blue. I had just been to congratulate Parke Godwin on his 85th birthday, dinner was ready almost—it is there now frozen!—Maria our maid came in and said, There is a fire at the front. I thought she meant the Lincoln over the way, but in a moment Rob shouted,

⁶ Mrs. John E. Roberts.

800 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

'The house is afire, hurry, Father.' I wanted to get my overcoat. He said, 'There's no time.' So we rushed for the iron stairway in the rear. It was full of servants from the apartments, screaming. 'Be quiet,' we said, 'and rush down.' The smoke was very heavy, but we set our heads to it and went through to the basement without harm. The fire started from a curtain ablaze from the story below, and burnt upward to the roof, taking the apartment across the hall, swept away the store rooms above, and all the servants' bedrooms. By this time they got the water tower up and poured floods into our apartment, so that the fire did not get hold, but the water they say was up to mid-leg, and then the ceilings came down, so you can see the sky. I have not been up at all. I dare not face the sight. I feel in my heart it was a living thing, the pretty home nest so warm and sweet, so perfect to its inmates, and now it is dead and frozen, grimed and ghastly. No, I cannot go up. Bertha, Robert and Mr. Roberts have been there. They went there last night when the fire fiend was slain. We had forgotten the canary, we must have it. So they went up, and there the little fellow was still alive in his cage, strewn with black embers, brought him down, gave him sugar with a drop of whiskey, and yester morning he began to pipe a little hoarsely. We were great friends. He would let no man or even woman sit in my chair without fierce protest. The clothes I sit in are all I have at this writing, the bureaus are frozen fast, and in my closet all my nice things are hard as boards with

ice. I did save that *old* jacket. I had it on. The pictures are all face down in the parlour, but Bertha thinks they are not badly damaged. The books may be not so badly ruined as we feared. . . . My children came down for me the moment they got the alarm. Robert and I are staying with them this week. . . . I was in sore dolour yesterday, but am pulling out I guess. Hosts of friends have come to help us. We want for nothing they can do. But, ah me! there is the dead and frozen nest all grimed. Well, I weathered the old storm of fire 30 years ago come October, and guess I shall weather this storm of water and fire, so won't be cast down there where the very help of the Lord came for me so long ago. I will let you know about the flotsam and jetsam when I know myself. We have a fair insurance, and generous hearts sweet as a full honeycomb insist on taking hold with us, and will not be said Nay, so that we have full and plenty of funds to get us on our feet. . . ."

Robert Collyer was in his 78th year when this new disaster came, and it shook him only less terribly than the great fire of thirty years before. It was some time before he rallied—even as late as June 14, he writes to a friend, "I am not quite my old self yet." But the zeal of Mr. and Mrs. Roberts in setting things to rights, the solicitous watchfulness and untiring labour of Robert, the abounding helpfulness of friends and parishion-

302 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ers, together with his own masterful and essentially optimistic spirit, combined to restore him in due season to much of his wonted peace of mind. The first week after the fire was spent in the home of his daughter, Mrs. Eastman. Then he went with his son to the palatial home of his ardent friend and supporter, Henry H. Rogers, where he remained until the summer. Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, meanwhile, had rented a temporary apartment, the melancholy business of salvage was undertaken by Robert, Bertha, and a devoted friend and parishioner, William S. Miller. This proved to be more profitable than had originally been thought possible. Furnishings were badly damaged or lost completely; but pictures were safe, and best of all "more books were saved from the drowning than we hoped to see—only two or three hundred are dead." Starting for his vacation in Dublin and Gloucester, he declared himself to be "in good heart," and says of "Robin" that "he has not been so well as now these 18 years." In October, an apartment was rented in the Van Corlear at 201 West 55th Street, and the home, twice ruined, started once again.

"... We are slowly getting things into order. I say We, but Robin and my niece do most of the work



ROBERT COLLYER AND REV. JOHN CUCKSON
*From a Snapshot taken at Plymouth, Mass., in the summer
of 1902. A delightfully characteristic pose!*



which falls to our lot, and I sit round and order while they mostly (dis)obey. Still we begin to feel at home and that's the main matter." ⁷

In November of this year, Collyer's letters contain the joyful announcement of the engagement of "Son Rob" to Gertrude Savage, "the daughter of my good associate."

". . . Clams at high tide cannot hold a candle to their delight, and ours in both houses. . . ." ⁸

The wedding took place in Billerica, Massachusetts, on July 17, 1902. "Robert and his bride took the boat for Nova Scotia the next day"; Collyer and his daughter, Mrs. Hosmer, went to Plymouth, and later to Gloucester. In the fall the family was reunited, with the new daughter-in-law taking Mrs. Roberts's place as homekeeper. "We are very cosy and contented, this old man and his children," is Collyer's happy testimony that winter.

To Mr. and Mrs. Luther N. Bradley,⁹ March 4, 1902:

⁷ Letter to Miss Peabody, October 18, 1901.

⁸ Letter to Miss Peabody, November 4, 1901.

⁹ Mrs. Bradley, "Jane," was the sister of Mrs. Samuel Collyer. "As a young woman she had a soprano voice of wonderful purity and sang for many years in the second Unity Church in Chicago Avenue. Father used to say that nothing could go wrong with Unity while she was at one end of the church, and he the other." (Statement of Samuel Collyer.)

804 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

"The lovely photograph you sent me is in my own room on the mantel, and I see it always as I dress in the morning, or whenever I sit there through the day. I can think of no finer bit of work of this sort, and I should have to think a good while before I found in mind or memory a finer couple than you yourselves are, *excuse me* for the praise to your faces but it is all true. I look at you and the old time comes back to me in the church we loved. Jane is singing sweetly as Melba, and the general is sitting in one of the pews on my left listening as perhaps he never listened to the minister, and I do not blame him and never did. It all comes back to me and all the sunshine of the early years. The Sundays in the church and the Mondays when I would come and sit by Jennie (an invalid sister) who week by week was wearing away toward the blessed heavens, where father would welcome her, and where the whole circle of the elders is now complete.

"You will be glad to hear what I have just told Louise, how well I am not merely for an old fellow but for any fellow—thank God. And 'honours are easy' through these years since Mr. Savage came—that is something about card playing, but I do not know what. I am going out to Chicago in May to attend the Conference and wonder if that will be the last time; if it should be, all right; I am glad to live but not greedy. You will see what murderous work we are doing in our city; it is very sad, and the city is all torn up underground and over, so that we are in great discomfort, but we cannot stay the tide of improvements any more

than we can stay the lift of the Hudson when the Atlantic pushes behind. Our new apartment is quiet, clean, warm and handsome and my own room—well, you ought to see it. Do come some day and it shall be ‘yourn’ while you consent to stay.”

To Mrs. Wilmot, July 19, 1902:

“ . . . I met a mighty man of science who told me as we sat on the piazza how many thousand million atoms there are in a square inch of hard wood, and how much room there is for each beggar to move in. He waved his arms as if the things had all out doors. I was well instructed but a bit tired, and for reward of my lesson with a big L, I asked him if he knew what Queen Elizabeth took her pills in, and stumped him. We got chummy. He told me he read all the sermons in the ‘Messiah Pulpit’ and enjoyed mine greatly, they differed so entirely from those by Mr. Savage (!), and he hoped I would live 20 years more. . . .”

To Miss Eugenie Heller, August 15, 1902:

“ . . . Went yesterday a-fishing and caught 000 000 fish. We did not weigh them. . . . Last evening I read my Burns in the church to a fine audience. Everybody was there as is anybody, and it was a *large* audience. . . .”

To “Dear Grandson Norman,” April 2, 1903:

806 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

“ . . . We are all well as usual in the home. . . . I get out and get off my monthly sermon, better or worse. I was glad to see they sang my hymn at the dedication of your church—did you know it was Grandpa’s? . . . The Bust I was sitting for has gone to the cutter at the marble yard. It is a fine likeness in clay, and will take about three months to finish the whole job. Then it will be placed in the Cooper Union for let us say a thousand years or so, to which of course the Collyer clan will make pilgrimage and bring wreaths of laurel and things. It will be all right and good if you get the Oxford fellowship, isn’t it, and come back all the more a man and American. The Ph.D. or whatever, will be a feather in your cap. They dub me D.D. here, but I tell them I have no right to that, and the dear old Methodist brotherhood only said I should be d——d when I left the fold, while they seem to have forgotten, for I preached in three of their churches on my last visit to England.”

To Mrs. Cohen, June 22, 1903:

“I think your letter is more welcome to me than your sojourn in your paradise must be to you. I was saying, Will my friend of the many years now write me again, and here is your hand under mine as I write. How ‘I would love to be there your glory to share,’ as the lines in the old hymn do not quite run, but near enough for a quotation. . . . No, dear friend, the nest

is not empty. Gertrude and Robin keep house for me in a way which leaves me little or nothing at all for desire, and so I am full of a sweet content. I am also well as usual, but have been not quite so well, and they called in the doctor, who kept me a prisoner two weeks mostly on pills and spoonsfull of bitter things to take on time, and it was about always time. I wish you could see our new apartment and have your breakfast and lunch and dinner off Gertrude's china *and* silver—bless me, how lovely they are, and how I wonder if this is me myself. It will be vacation in a week, and I shall go to the hills, and to the sea at Plymouth. . . . The church goes bravely on, noble congregations and noble sermons. . . . My work such as it is must be almost done. I shall ask to be retired I think in December when I am full four-score. The most foolish thing a minister can do is to hang on and on like a frosted apple in December. . . .”

To “Dear Grandson Norman,” August 7, 1908:

“. . . We ordain Max, Savage's son, Gertrude's brother, who will go at once to Redlands, Cal., to take charge of a church, so if you strike that place when you go forth with the cornet, flute, harp and sackbut,^{2a} you must tell him who you are. . . . (I hear) the General and my sweet singer are well and looking well. I heard Aunt Jane's voice for the first time 44 years

^{2a} Norman was a member of the University Glee Club.

308 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ago this summer and since then have heard no voice more sweet and winsome. I am almost rudely well, and am down to preach every Sunday hither and yonder to the end of September. I soon get tired of resting."

On September 23, 1903, came another shaking sorrow in the death of his daughter Harriett (Mrs. Eastman). Three months later, on December 8, as though to match the sorrow with great joy, came the celebration of Collyer's eightieth birthday in a way that revived memories of the seventieth anniversary a decade before. A reception was held in the chapel; and then came exercises in the church, at which letters of congratulation were read, and addresses given by Edmund Clarence Stedman, the poet; George Batchelor, editor of *The Christian Register*; Thomas R. Slicer, John White Chadwick, Theodore C. Williams, Minot J. Savage, and Mr. George H. Ellis, of Boston. A delightful feature of this event was the arrival from England of a congratulatory letter from an old blind Yorkshireman, J. Harmsworth by name, whom Collyer had never seen. The following reply went across the seas in due order:

"*Dear old Patriarch:*

"How good it is to read and reread your letter, full

of good cheer, blind as Milton was, but with the blessed heart-light when your eyes see no more the light of the sun. If I should take to groaning some day, I will think of you, and be ashamed of myself. I am running over the list of places you will see but not with your eyes, and they are very pleasant. The birds are singing and the hawthorns are in blossom, and there is a throstle nest in that holly bush on the left hand as you go up Hopper Lane just before you come to the stee where you take the foot path to Crag Hall. I look down the grand avenue from this window, it is snowing hard—but in Washburn valley it is summer time in the thirties, and even 'Catch-'em corner' stands in the sunlight. I wonder how the corner caught that name. In one of my books there is a notice of some Quakers in Askwith, and I think an application from headquarters to hold meetings. I never heard of a meeting-house there and am glad to learn from you there was one. May have been also a place for burial near Fairfield Hall on the way from Addingham to Bolton Bridge. . . . This brings all the good wishes for a happy new year and as many more as you will welcome."

Collyer's suggestion of retirement at this time met with no response from the Church of the Messiah. That he might be relieved, however, of every burden of responsibility, and hence of all worry, the following vote was passed at the

310 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

annual meeting on December 14, "Whereas the Rev. Robert Collyer reached his 80th birthday on the 8th of December, and whereas it will be gratifying to him that the following action be taken, therefore Resolved, that he be made Pastor Emeritus of the Church of the Messiah and that his present salary be continued as long as he remains with us."

So great was the interest displayed in Dr. Collyer's arrival at what he called "the eightieth mile-stone of (his) pilgrimage," and so many were the requests for some memoirs of his great career, "that (his) heart was moved," as he puts it, "to do something of this sort." From December, 1903, to April, 1905, therefore, he printed in *The Christian Register* a series of papers, under the title of "Some Memories." These were based partly on manuscript lectures, which he had written in earlier years,¹⁰ but mostly on the recollections of this late moment in his life, and constituted an autobiography of incomparable charm. They were gathered together and published in book-form by the American Unitarian Association in 1905. One year later, in 1906, Collyer published a short biographical sketch of Father Taylor. This was the last vol-

¹⁰ "From the Anvil to the Pulpit," "My Mother," "Our Dale," etc., etc.

ume to come from his pen. In 1908, however, there appeared in England a new collection of his published sermons, entitled "Where the Light Dwelleth," with an introduction by Rev. Charles Hargrove; in this country, in 1911, Miss Imogene Clarke compiled and published a collection of paragraphs "from the spoken and written words of Robert Collyer," entitled "Thoughts For Daily Living"; and in 1914, two years after his death, there appeared a volume of lectures, addresses and poems, entitled "Clear Grit."

To Mr. Wilmot, from Nova Scotia, July 8, 1904:

"Here we are in clover, strangers in a strange land, far from the madding crowd, and with a small crowd who are by no means madding. A lot have gone to dig clams for a clam bake this evening after supper. They caution me to take a light supper, but if they mean I shall fill my poor but ample stomach on clams cooked in a barrel, they are cherishing a delusion. It is a nice sweet home-like place, this Inn. A sort of Gretna Green where the inmates get married somewhere else and then 'run away' here as Rob and Gertrude did two years ago. Nice couples who do not spoon before folks, as is meet and right. . . . This is a wild hill country, *all* hills hereabouts and no valleys, only 'dips.' The valley is all water, the ocean, which

312 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

steals in through a chasm from the Bay of Fundy. I like the look of the land and the folks. . . ."

To Mrs. James T. Fields, April 17, 1905:

" . . . Robin my Laddie has been under the knife again, woe is me, but he is cheerful as a lark again. And I am well, thanks be. Also I preached yester-week to a full church. Likewise to them the Lord loveth, i. e. cheerful givers, so that the Deacons say I went Brother Savage much more than one better in the collection."

To Lady Lawrence, January 19, 1906:

" . . . I passed the eighty-second mile-stone in December, free from ache or pain, for which I thank the Giver of every good and perfect gift. I do not see quite so well, or hear, but the doctor for eyes there across the avenue looks after my eyes, and I hear well enough for an old man, also the noise of this Babylon is softened. My son and dear wife look after me week-days and Sundays, especially Sundays when they will not leave a white hair on my coat before I start for the church. I preach now and then to the dear old *and* new congregation. . . . Go out now and then to take a service where I am especially wanted. I go to-morrow about 250 miles to Fairhaven . . . and in October next out to Chicago, a thousand miles. So I am busy, and happy to lend a hand, and do not want to be laid

on the shelf, nor do they want me. Mr. Savage is my brother beloved. . . . This is the tenth year we have lived and worked together, and no thin mist of trouble has ever fallen between us." . . .

The month after the writing of this cheerful letter, Dr. Savage "dropped in his tracks"—a physical and mental wreck.¹¹ Suddenly, without warning of any kind, the Pastor-Emeritus, then an aged man in his eighty-third year, found himself shouldered with the full burden of church administration which he had so happily shared with his younger colleague ten years before. The twelve months which followed this disaster must be regarded as one of the most gallant periods of Robert Collyer's life. Almost at once it took on the proportions of heroism. Regularly every Sunday, either in his own pulpit, or in exchange with some neighbouring colleague, the old man conducted his service and preached his sermon, as though he had drunk deep of some lost fountain of youth and was preparing to enter upon a new career. Added to this were the routine duties of the parish—weddings, funerals, baptisms, the Sunday school, together with long conferences with trustees and outside denominational

¹¹ He preached for the last time on February 12, and resigned on May 10.

814 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

officials about the future of the church. More serious still was the inward trial of looking out upon a disheartened people and a scattered congregation. For Dr. Savage's retirement had led to instant demoralisation. Ten years of notable leadership had gathered a new flock within the walls of the Church of the Messiah which knew the voice of this one shepherd, and which scattered the moment that that voice was no longer heard. Only the faithful remnant of the earlier Collyer days remained, and while these rallied to the support of their beloved patriarch, they served but to remind him, and one another, of the proportions of the disaster which had been suffered. "We have closed the church," writes Dr. Collyer¹² in early June, "the hearing of the strangers was so slim."

Never for a moment, however, did the aged leader falter. The burden of labour must have taxed his physical, mental and moral vigour to the limit. Disappointment and sorrow must have weighed with dire heaviness upon his heart. The work so grandly accomplished in the seventeen years from 1879 to 1896, and then transferred so happily to the care of his younger colleague for even greater glory, was tumbled to pieces, as it were, in a single night. The whole

¹² To Miss Eugenie Heller.

thing must be done over again, the structure rebuilt from the very foundations. But this was only the more reason for getting to work promptly and with undaunted heart! He had never thought to see this day! But he now saw it, and, with that steadfast refusal to close his eyes to facts which was one of his most remarkable characteristics, he set about making the best possible adaptation to the existing environment, that he might win survival. A wonderful cheer runs through the short, crisp, business-like letters of these crowded days. He tells Mrs. Cohen of his labours, describes "the work (as) much lighter than the care," and tosses off the whole situation with the blithe phrase, "it's all in the day's work."¹³ He writes to Jasper Douthit that he is as "busy as a hive o' bees," and when he sees his old friend discouraged, finds plenty of surplus light in his own heart to dispel the latter's darkness. "No, sir, you are not going to lay by," he writes. "You are going right on same as ever. The spring has not dried up and not a-going to, mind what I say."¹⁴ He informs Mrs. Fields that he has read Pater "with great interest but no delight," and finds it fortunate that he "should also be reading 'The Antiquary'

¹³ Letter undated.

¹⁴ Dated October 13, 1906.

816 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

in evenings just now after dinner to about 10 or say one-half past.”¹⁵ Never was Collyer more fully his buoyant, radiant, hopeful, human self than during this trying year. For just this short time, in answer to great emergency, he was at his best. And what this meant to the church, only those who went through the experience with him, or succeeded upon it later, can rightly know.

In the fall of 1906, Dr. Collyer opened his pulpit to candidates for the vacant charge. On December 10, “the society unanimously voted to extend a call to Rev. Mr. Holmes to become the pastor of the church.”¹⁶ On the first Sunday in February, 1907, I entered upon my duties.

The summer of 1907 was made notable by an eighth and final voyage to England. The occasion of this trip is described in a letter to Samuel, dated July 28.

“I shall take the steamer from Boston, if all is well. . . . I had only dreamed I might go over once more, but they are building a free library there for which Andrew Carnegie gave them three thousand pounds, and they want me to open it. I cannot say them nay—and they have also employed an artist to make two medallions in bronze they will set up in the library,

¹⁵ Dated November 1, 1906.

¹⁶ Record in the church book.

life-size one of Andrew and the other of meself, so you will see I must go. The Court of the Victoria University of Leeds are also head on to bestow on me the degree of Lit. D., which same is a great honour, and ask me to be present to receive it. So that is another magnet to draw me over the sea. And the other is, I want to see my sister, your Aunt Maria, once more, who is now a widow. This began to pull at my heart when her husband died about two years ago. Dear son, I am an old man now, very hearty and well but an old man. And when I go hence you will have to come East, if not before. Have made my will and you may have—will have—enough to make you easy in your old age. I mention this because it may be you will not be able to lay up enough and so will not be at ease touching this matter, while you may be laying up enough and to spare. Give my loving regard to all my kith and kin in the household. I wish I could run over and spend a summer with you, but I guess that is past praying for."

Under the affectionate care of his niece, Mrs. Roberts, he sailed from Boston on the *Saxonia* on August 7. The ceremony, for which he had crossed the seas, took place on Wednesday, October 2, and from beginning to end was one great tribute of affection to Robert Collyer. A bust of Ilkley's most famous son was unveiled in the entrance-hall of the library. The great gold

818 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

key, with which he opened the doors for the first time, was presented to him as a memento. And as a climax of the public meeting at which assembled "the largest crowd ever gathered in Ilkley,"¹⁷ he was handed an imposing illuminated Address, lithographed in satin-lined vellum and mounted on ivory rollers, which read as follows:

"Vivit post funera virtus"

(Virtue survives the grave)

To the Rev. Robert Collyer

"DEAR SIR—On behalf of the inhabitants of Ilkley, we beg to offer you our hearty congratulations on your having successfully undertaken the journey from America in your eighty-fourth year, also to express thanks for the kindly interest you have always shown towards our district and in everything tending to promote its progress and welfare, but more especially for the service rendered us on this occasion.

"Though more than half a century has passed since you left Ilkley to seek your fortune in a far-off land, we know by many acts of kindness that your love for the scenes of your youth and early manhood has never waned, and that by opening our New Public Library to-day pleasant associations are renewed which connect the

¹⁷ Report in *Ilkley Gazette* (October 8, 1907).

present with the past through many bygone years.

"We, therefore, feel proud to subscribe our names hereto in honour of a man whose long career has been devoted to the promotion of all that is good and noble in life, and trust you may long be spared to continue to use that influence by voice and pen, which has already done so much for the benefit of mankind.

"The Common Seal of the Ilkley Urban District Council was hereunto affixed this 2nd day of October, 1907, by

"J. C. BARKER (Chairman)

"In the presence of
(twelve signatures)."

Other honours were bestowed upon Dr. Collyer in abundance on this last visit to the mother country. By all odds the most notable was the degree of Doctor of Literature, conferred in September by Victoria University in the city of Leeds. On October 5, he sailed from Liverpool for New York on the *Lusitania*, the first voyage of this great and ill-fated steamship.

The last quiet years were now before him—the winters in New York with "Rob and Gertrude," browsing over his books, writing his friendly letters, always on Sunday mornings in

320 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

his well-loved pulpit; the summers in the early months with friends or parishioners, at South Poland one year, at Medomak another, at Nantucket a third, and in the later months always at "The Delphine," in East Gloucester, in charge of his faithful daughter, Mrs. Hosmer. Collyer was now entered upon the full wonder of his old age. Beauty sat upon him as a crown of light. Serenity was about him as an atmosphere. Cheerfulness radiated from his countenance as the glow of sunset in the western sky. His letters, although now few and short, reflect the peace and joy of his days.

To Mrs. Samuel Collyer, December 10, 1908:

"I have owed you a letter some time out of mind, so that you may think you are left out in the cold. Well, it is not so. You are still as ever mine, our Sam's wife and my sweetheart every time. Something about my welfare and ours you will have gleaned. How they have set me on pedestals and praised me to their hearts content and beyond my deserving.¹⁸ . . . Robert is smoking his after breakfast cigar, I have smoked mine. I am fairly well, but feel my 85 years some, and no wonder. Do odd jobs in preaching, take the services at the Sunday school and other bits of work. . . . Sam's photo hangs in our dining room, but it is in

¹⁸ Eighty-fifth birthday celebration. See below, page 323.

profile, so he does not look down on us but may perhaps squint across his nose to see us at the Sunday dinner. He may have smelled the Michaelmas goose—it was a dandy. The bit of paper I enclose is your very own. I shall give Robin and Gertrude each one and the same, for our old mother used to say Christmas comes but once a year. . . .”

To Miss E. Vatet, December 9, 1909:

“It is ever so nice this card, and the note makes music for my ancient ears. We had a quiet, holy day, and I feel one day younger if anything. You do not know what this means, for you are but a lassie, yet stay with us until you reach your eighty-seventh year, and then I hope you will be as hearty as

Yours always”

To Lady Lawrence, January 7, 1910:

“. . . I passed my eighty-sixth milestone in good case. Father Time seemed to smile and bid me good morning. I am not so spry as I have been, but that was to be expected. I wanted to give up my stipend as Pastor Emeritus at the end of the year, and still help around as usual. But they would not have it so—I must have my stipend and do just as I pleased, much or little, but the much is little now. About the only trouble I can think of is that I shall see dear old England no more, but this comes and goes like the

322 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

mist on a summer morning. Also I *do* see the old home and the ever dear friends, and dwell in a sweet content. . . ."

To "The Wilmots," June 28, 1910:

" . . . Here we are¹⁹ in prime content. . . . The house is homelike, sweet and clean. . . . We are on a rise, with the sea a quarter of a mile away, on which we look all the day long and are learning her moods and tenses. I get my *Tribune* about two in the afternoon the same day, so we know just what you 'uns are doing, and the *Evening Post* of the day before by the same mail. . . . I am to preach in our church on Sunday. . . ."

To "Our Wilmots," July 20, 1911:

"Here we are,²⁰ very much alive and of good cheer. . . . I read a good deal and ramble some, but not much. . . . Daughter Emma walks two miles every day. I walk up and along the piazza some, and shall not wear it out before we leave. I go to meetin' Sunday mornings, but ours is closed in the town, so I have gone to the Baptists. Well, the young minister got to know, and came here to ask me to preach for them. I said I would if the Deacons invited me, otherwise he might have trouble. This was done and I preached for them

¹⁹ Nantucket.

²⁰ East Gloucester, Mass.

last Sunday to a large congregation, a sermon as innocent as sterilised new milk. . . . I go to Lynn for next Sunday . . . then I preach at Manchester, and that's all. . . ."

To Jasper Douthit, March 4, 1912:

"I am glad to believe that you are out of the woods, safe and sound. We have all said our bit prayer for you, who have followed you to the promised land, and now you are there almost! We may draw a long breath and whisper *Dominus Vobiscum*, which is all the Latin I can be sure about, because I learned it at the Catholic chapel when I were a 'prentice lad and so it must be right. I am nothin' to brag on, as Aunt Sally said at the class meeting, but try to be not quite nobody. The eighty-ninth year finds me troubled to see my Mss. when I try to preach, but I *do* try. Yesterday I went up to the Hackley School to preach to the students. Robin and Gertrude went with me and said, I filled the bill, but I did not think so. . . ."

Events during these years were few. On December 8, 1908, he was given a dinner by the Unitarian Club of New York in honour of his eighty-fifth birthday. This anniversary was further observed by Andrew Carnegie, a friend of long standing, who gave in Collyer's honour a private dinner at which Lyman Abbott, Hugh

824 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Black, Sir C. Purden Clarke, Mark Twain, Richard Watson Gilder, Bishop David H. Greer, Norman Hapgood, Seth Low, Hamilton W. Mabie, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, William Vaughn Moody, Jacob A. Riis, John C. Van Dyke, Oswald Garrison Villard, Horace White, and Woodrow Wilson were some of the invited guests.

On January 31, 1911, to his great delight he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the Meadville Theological School, an honour richly deserved, not only because of his services to Unitarianism, but also because of the great benefactions which on three separate occasions he had secured for this institution.²¹

To his son, Samuel, he writes on December 26:

"Endless have been the tokens of goodwill touching my birthday, and your telegram came right on time, so welcome. What would you think of an umbrella with a big real golden handle! Well, that's what I got among many things, and now what shall I do with it? To take it out into the rain would be sacrilege. I did think of a label to be tied on saying, This is brass.

²¹ These were \$25,000 in 1900 for "The Robert Collyer Library Fund"; \$50,000 in 1901 for "The Robert Collyer Endowment"; and \$50,000 in 1901 for "The Robert Collyer Endowment for the President's Chair."

We have all sorts of fun about it, but it's no laughing matter. We talk of the safe deposit. . . ."

If these last years, however, were quiet and uneventful, they were by no means without distinction. In one particular, at least, I believe they are properly to be rated among the most notable of his entire career. Certainly as revelations of his pure nobility of character, they are unsurpassed. In saying this, I have in mind that to which I alone am able to give testimony—namely, Collyer's relations during the last five years of his life with his associate who was younger than he by a span of fifty-six years, approved by an experience in the ministry of less than three years, and possessed by ideas which were those of an age into which he had not intellectually entered. I love to recall the November Sunday when I preached in the Messiah pulpit, for the first time, as a candidate. As we waited together in the church parlour for the beginning of the service, Collyer noticed my nervousness. "Are ye nervous, laddie?" was his gentle question, as we arose to enter the pulpit. I confessed the soft impeachment. "Don't ye mind," he smiled, as he laid his huge hand on my shoulder, "they're just folks out there, like your own at home. Ye'll do your best, I know." Later there

326 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

was the Sunday, in February, 1907, when I took my place for the first time as minister of the church. The dear old man was all smiles and tears as he met me, and surrendered to my keeping the noble charge which had been his for nearly thirty years. Literally did he fold me in his great arms, and, smiling as only he could smile, wish me Godspeed, and pledge to me his full support so long as he should live.

Never for one moment thereafter did he forget or ignore that sacred pledge. It seems to me, as I look back upon those years of our relationship together, that his was a veritable miracle of self-abnegation. It is never easy for an old, successful and long-experienced veteran to surrender his baton of authority to a fresh and untried stripling. Many have failed in the attempt, and, when they have not wholly failed, have bungled the matter disastrously. The temptation is almost irresistible to retain unconsciously the function of leadership, to block the initiative and question the policies of the younger man, to interfere with criticism, well meant perhaps but necessarily embarrassing. It would have been perfectly natural, if precedent teaches anything, for Dr. Collyer to have exercised his more or less familiar ministerial functions, and left me to adapt myself to his wishes and habits as best I

could. I should never have blamed him, I think, nor had the heart to object, had he held me to the position of a subordinate. Certainly I gave him ample opportunity, by mistakes of judgment and policy, to caution, advise, or even command. But never once did anything of the kind occur. From the first moment of my advent, he spoke to me, and of me, as "his minister," and looked to me for direction. On our very first Sunday together, he asked, with the most touching simplicity and sincerity, if he could help any in the morning service. For an entire year after that date, he never once offered to take part in the exercises of worship until I had requested him to do so. Then he accepted with great joy—and in later years fell into the habit of taking the Scriptures and prayers unbidden, only because he had come to know that this was my desire always. In the same way did he refrain from seeking for opportunities to preach. Only once in a period of five years and a half did he ask to preach in my stead—in 1909, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his entrance into the Unitarian ministry, which I had stupidly forgotten—and then did he seek permission with almost painful scrupulousness. At all other times he preached only when I had personally invited him, and in the later years only in answer to my very earnest

328 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

and repeated solicitations. In the beginning, he refused to precede me into the pulpit. It was only by insistence that I was able to persuade him to occupy the centre one of the three chairs upon the platform. Invariably did he refer all business, all inquiries, all decisions to me. Even had I been sensitive, which I was not, I could not have found in all those years one instance of interference with my prerogatives, of usurpation, even unconscious, of my functions. It is just because I know how human Dr. Collyer was, that I know also how difficult must have been this complete surrender of leadership, and how supreme a mastery of spirit, therefore, it connoted.

To an outsider, unaware of the wonderfully beautiful co-operation which Dr. Collyer gave me at all times—wise advice whenever I sought it, sympathy like a healing balm when I needed it, support which at certain crises alone made possible the continuance of my ministry—it might have seemed as though the senior pastor were shrinking into the background in some conscious spirit of disappointment or disapproval, so scrupulous was he in his subordination of self, in his yielding of precedence to the younger man. That he was not always happy, especially over my pulpit work, I must believe. His very silence, in such sharp contrast to his contagious

enthusiasm when anything pleased him, now and then betrayed unwittingly his inward trouble of mind and heart. Gladly would I have avoided all occasion of disagreement. It was my highest joy during all those years to see the smile upon his lips when I did or said a thing which pleased him; and more than once I wept bitter tears at the thought that some word or deed of mine had alarmed and perhaps pained him. But there were words which I had to speak and things which I had to do, if I were to be true to myself, and I went ahead. Never once, however, did I see the look of reproach in his eyes, or receive a word of reproof from his lips. If he could not say Amen, he kept silent. Nay, more than this—when dear friends of the years gone by came to him and made complaint against the heresies of the new minister, he refused to listen, and told them, with such sharpness as he could command, that their duty was loyalty to the man whom they had chosen to lead. I recall a sunny June day, at a Hackley School Commencement, when we were left alone together for a time, and he questioned me, in a rather troubled way, about Socialism, of which I was then saying much in the Messiah pulpit. I tried as hard as I could to tell him what was in my heart, but he was not satisfied. "I don't see," he said, with a vigour

880 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

which startled me. Then he smiled, like the sun on Denton Moor, and said, "But that don't matter, laddie. If *you* see, it's all right! Say it all just the way ye want to." And now, as I look over these letters which he left behind and which have fallen to my hands, how does it make my heart sing to read words which, addressed to distant friends, he could never have dreamed that I would see. One example I venture here to set down:

"We have a young man of a burning enthusiasm touching Socialism. He gives it to us hot and hot, and has a fine hearing. The church is on the way again to prosperity."²²

The pictures of these days I fain would dwell upon—they are the loveliest my life has brought me. I think of that handsome old man, with his giant-like frame, stalwart shoulders, and long white hair crowning his benignant features, sitting quietly in the pulpit on a Sunday morning, listening to the hymns or leading the responses. I see him standing by the communion table, telling of old friends and loved ones long since gone, and of his readiness to follow after. I hear him speaking those simple, childlike, inspired prayers,

²² To Mrs. Cohen, December 31, 1910.

which "old men and maidens, young men and children" heard with equal reverence and delight. I watch him stumping stoutly along Broadway, his big felt hat pressed tightly over his snowy locks, his eyes set straight ahead, his cane keeping rhythmic time to the firm fall of his footsteps, while passers-by turn involuntarily to look again upon so striking a figure, and policemen smile in welcome and give him escort across crowded thoroughfares. I am mindful of him in his home, clothed in his velvet smoking jacket, with his huge thumb placed between the pages of some old book read many times before, listening patiently to my statement of some trouble, or telling with glowing countenance some tender memory of other days. "A patriarchal presence, perpetual benediction, as of the greater gods. A man, in sum, who held all gods in solution in his soul."²³ Such I knew him—and such he will live forever in my heart!

²³ Merle St. C. Wright—See "Robert Collyer: A Memorial," page 17.

CHAPTER XVI

SUNSET AND AFTER-GLOW

1912

" . . . Some white patriarch, whose sun is setting, and whose life has fallen to the lowest ebb of the tide."—R. C. in "Where the Light Dwelleth," page 328.

ROBERT COLLYER spent the summer of 1912 in East Gloucester. He seemed to be in that unvarying condition of good health and abounding vitality which had long been the wonder of all who knew him, until the last weeks of the vacation season, when he suffered a fall which bruised his arm and side, and shook him badly. It chanced that in late September of this year, the Ministers Institute had its biennial meeting at Gloucester. This brought me to the town, and enabled me to see him, as I had never done before, in his summer environment. I found him well, save for the swollen arm, and in great good spirits. At one session of the Institute, he gave an informal address, full of spicy anecdote and



ROBERT COLLYER
From a late Photograph, taken about 1905



sage counsel, which was received with abounding delight by the clergymen who were present.

On his return to New York, Dr. Collyer seemed to be fully recovered from his slight accident, as hale and hearty as I had ever known him. He showed his usual keen interest in the affairs of the church, took his accustomed part in the Sunday services, and went easily and happily about the daily routine which he had followed year in and year out for well-nigh half a century.

Suddenly, on the first day of November, he was stricken with paralysis. A heavy fall in his bedroom gave warning to the family, who found him lying prostrate and helpless on the floor. At the moment, he showed remarkable signs of recovery. He refused stoutly to take to his bed, talked clearly and coherently of what he expected to do on this day or that, and spoke to me with familiar zest about church affairs. On Wednesday, November 6, however, there was a perceptible change for the worse; he was put to bed and placed in charge of nurses. Then followed a prolonged period of watching and waiting. The right side of the heavy body was inert, and speech was becoming thick. Still, there was no evidence that partial recovery was not possible, and his physician, Dr. Robert H. Wylie,

declined to make prophecies for the future. On the one hand, there was the paralytic stroke which had stricken and maimed him—on the other hand, was a vitality which, for all his years, was still of marvellous power and efficiency. His mind also was remarkably clear. I called upon him daily, and could note little change for either the better or the worse. He always knew me, smiled upon me graciously, lifted his left hand from the coverlet in that peculiar beating gesture which indicated pleasure, and tried patiently and determinedly to talk. As the month drew toward its end, however, he began little by little, by almost imperceptible degrees, to slip away. On Sunday, the 24th, announcement was made in the Church of the Messiah, for the first time, of his serious condition. The following week, he held his own with a steadiness which baffled every expectation. I was due to preach at Cornell University on the next Sunday, and was held in uncertainty from day to day as to whether or not I could safely leave for Ithaca. On Friday, I was told that I could go. Early on Saturday morning, however, there came the order for me to stay. The night had brought unmistakable signs that the end was near. Hour after hour we watched. Consciousness was gone now, but the heart was beating on, even as the

great arm had in old days beat the anvil with the iron hammer. By evening, however, it began to weaken, and a half hour before midnight it was still. On the last day of the month, and the last hour (November 30, 1912), Robert Collyer "fell on sleep."

Clusters of white lilies in the vacant pulpit chair spoke their silent word to the people assembled in the Church of the Messiah on the Sunday morning. Already the newspapers had carried the story of the great man's passing, far and wide throughout the land. By afternoon the messages of condolence began to arrive, and continued in unbroken flow for days thereafter. From all parts of the country, and from England, they came; all welcome, but none more so, perhaps, than the cablegram from the Mayor and Corporation of Keighley, the Yorkshire town in which, almost by chance, Collyer had been born, and which held in memory after all these years the honour of this event. Comment in the press, both daily and weekly, was universal; there lies on my desk, as I write, a scrap-book with one hundred and thirty large pages of clippings gathered at this time. One tribute of peculiar beauty may be taken as expressive of the general sentiment:

336 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

"Robert Collyer is at his end, or near it, returning late to heaven, almost in his nineties. For two generations he has worked for the good of this country and of everybody in it of goodwill. Methodist or Unitarian, what creed save the love of God and man was that of this fine old athletic figure, blacksmith of God, who hammered many wickednesses and shams; who, mill-hand as he was in boyhood, learned an English of rare force, felicity and beauty, and knew the hardest kind of work, and the ennobling graces and refinements of life?

"Great captains with their trumps and drums, orators and sophists with their mouths of thunder, the sons of shrewdness that run away with the supposed first prizes of the world, these have their loud hours and high places; but what are they by the side of spirits of kindness and missionaries of benevolence like Robert Collyer?"¹

On Monday, December 2, after private prayers in the home conducted by Dr. Savage, the body was taken to the Church of the Messiah, and there, lovingly guarded by members of the Board of Ushers, was laid in state before the pulpit which he had glorified for more than a generation. All through the day, came friends and associates to look upon his noble countenance. Quietly they gazed, some paused or

¹ Editorial in the *New York Sun*, November 29.

knelt in prayer, and all, as though by some divine suggestion, were moved not by sorrow, but by a reverent and solemn joy. In such a life, thus wonderfully prolonged, death was clearly seen as but an incident.

The next morning (December 3), at ten o'clock, were held the public services. When the gates of the church were thrown open, there entered more than a hundred persons who had been waiting patiently for admission. A great company of friends, which included Protestant clergymen of all denominations, Jewish rabbis and a few Catholic priests, assembled speedily, and filled the edifice. The services were opened with the singing of Dr. Collyer's favourite hymn, "O worship the King, all-glorious above." Then came the readings—psalms of joy and of the righteous life, the Beatitudes, Paul's words of immortality, St. John's revelation of "a new heaven and a new earth," Bryant's poem, "Why mourn ye that our ancient friend is dead?" The hymn, "O, sometimes gleams upon our sight," was followed by addresses by Dr. Merle St. Croix Wright, minister of the Lenox Avenue Unitarian Church, Dr. Frank Oliver Hall, minister of the Universalist Church of the Divine Paternity, and myself. The end came with prayer, and the singing of Chadwick's "It sing-

338 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

eth low in every heart." ² In the bright noon-tide of a snowy winter-day, the body was laid to rest at Woodlawn cemetery, in the "lovely bit of land with a gentle slope and look westward," where the dear ones of his heart had preceded him. The end of what had begun eighty-nine years before in the heather moors of Yorkshire, was come.

Services and meetings in memory of Robert Collyer were many. On the Sunday following the burial, December 8, which by a beautiful coincidence marked the eighty-ninth anniversary of his birth, I had the honour of preaching the Memorial Sermon before the congregation of the Church of the Messiah.³ On Tuesday, December 18, the Robert Collyer Men's Club of this church held a memorial meeting, at which addresses were delivered by Mr. J. Burnet Nash and Dr. S. Adolphus Knopf, trustees, Rev. William H. Brundage, minister of the Third Unitarian Church, Brooklyn, Rev. Leon A. Harvey, minister of the Fourth Unitarian Church, Brooklyn, and myself.⁴

Unity Church, Chicago, chose the birthday, Sunday, December 8, for its service in memory

² See "Robert Collyer: A Memorial," pages 9-33.

³ Ibid, pages 35-62.

⁴ Ibid, pages 63-83.

of the man who had lifted it to a position of first importance among the churches of the country. In the pulpit, decked with roses, stood the anvil at which Collyer had laboured over sixty years before in the old Ilkley smithy shop.* Mr. William Elliott Furness, who had heard the first sermon which Dr. Collyer preached in the Unitarian church in Philadelphia, and had been a member of Unity Church at the time when Collyer became its pastor, gave impressive reminiscences of those early days. Other addresses were given by Benjamin F. Adams and Samuel E. Greeley, both parishioners of Dr. Collyer through all his Chicago ministry; and an original hymn, written for the occasion by Rev. Frederick V. Hawley, minister of Unity, was sung by the choir and people.

Similar services were held at the Unitarian Church in Washington, D. C., at the Second Unitarian Church in Brooklyn, and at the Rogers Memorial Church in Fairhaven, at all of

* This anvil had been brought to Unity Church in Dr. Collyer's day by Mr. William S. Lewis, a parishioner and friend. In a letter to Miss Alice Baker, Collyer says, "William S. Lewis, whom you know, writes me just now from England. 'I have been to the dear old place where you used to live, and found the blacksmith shop where you served as an apprentice, and afterward as manager, about to be sold out. I bought the old anvil and hammer, and shall bring them over and put them in your study.'"—This was done; and the relics are now carefully preserved in Unity.

340 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

which places Collyer had been a frequent and honoured visitor in his closing years. Sermons in loving tribute to the memory of their venerable colleague were preached generally throughout the country by Unitarian clergymen. A service of unique interest was that held on Sunday, February 3, 1913, in Sage Chapel, at Cornell, where for over twenty years Robert Collyer had annually preached to the faculty and students. Before the pulpit was placed a portrait of the Doctor; and over this was hung the famous horseshoe, which the blacksmith-preacher had forged for the University at the time of the Chicago fire. Acting President T. F. Crane, speaking on "Robert Collyer and Cornell University," gave the history of how the man and the institution had been brought together in loving relationship; Professor George Lincoln Burr, an intimate friend of Collyer's through many years, told a tale of infinite charm about "Robert Collyer at Cornell;" and I talked briefly on my associations with him in New York. A great throng of young men and young women, all of whom knew the Collyer story and some of whom had seen and heard the man himself, listened with reverent interest to these tributes.

Permanent memorials of Robert Collyer are not lacking. A "Library Fund" and two "En-

dowment Funds" bear his name, as we have seen, at the Meadville Theological School. Oil paintings hang upon the walls of the Unitarian Headquarters building in Boston, and of the Messiah chapel in New York. Marble busts hold places of honour in Unity Church, Chicago, the Cooper Union building in New York, and the Free Public Library in Ilkley. In the Church of the Messiah, the pew occupied through many years by the Collyer family has been set apart *in perpetuo*, for the use of strangers within the gates, as the "Robert Collyer Memorial Pew"; two stained-glass windows, one presented by Dr. Collyer's children, the other by Mrs. M. S. Simpson, a devoted parishioner, give beauty to the edifice in his name; and a heroic bronze portrait relief, a master-work of Mr. Henry Hering, and the gift of good friends everywhere, stands at the western portal as a kind of shrine for worshippers.

"The memorial of virtue is immortal," we are told. If this be true, it must endure in something more substantial than the monuments of men's hands. For colours fade, stones crumble into dust, proud cities become ash-heaps in a desert. Names may survive the wreckage of the past, and deeds be told in years that knew them not. But those only live who have been loved;

842 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

immortality is the fresh creation on each new day of earth, of affection for the dead. It is thus that we may say that the real memorials of Robert Collyer are in the souls of those who knew him, and love him still as in the former time. The faces that glow when his name is named, the hearts that sing when his words are spoken, the eyes that never close upon the vision of his radiant presence—these are his monuments! It is true, these soon will pass, as all things human pass. A few years more, and there will be no one left who heard his voice or looked upon his smile. But already before he died, there entered into the race that tradition of virtue and benignity which is the inevitable deposit of a holy spirit; and this tradition will endure. Robert Collyer is become a legend. His life is a tale upon men's lips, a song within their hearts. Were there chroniclers to-day, it would be a story like that of Christopher or Francis; were there minstrels, it would be a ballad like that of Roland. But if there be no chroniclers or minstrels in our prosaic times, there are still men's hungry and thirsty souls; and these to-day, as yesterday, will not let die what they have found of good. Up from the unmeasured past, to each new generation, there come the sainted dead who live again in quickening love. Some are but a

fragrance of ineffable sweetness—some a tale of heroism, or patience, or goodwill—some a light that like a sun disperses darkness. But all, like the living Christ, are in some way the life of men, and thus themselves immortal. Into this great company, a humble but infinitely lovely member, Robert Collyer has been received. To-day as yesterday, men who knew him not, speak his name with gladness; and to-morrow will be even as to-day.

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT IS THE SECRET?

"What is the secret? If you can, impart
Your cheery gospel of the trusting heart.
But, if 'tis not transferrable, why then,
No whit the less we bring a glad amen—
Glad that you, somehow, know the blessed art."

John White Chadwick, in
"To Robert Collyer (1823-1893)"

STUDY of a great life, like contact with a great personality, always raises at last the question, What is the secret? This is as true of Robert Collyer as of all other distinguished men. Indeed, it is perhaps especially true of him. For most of the well-known figures of history carry the mark of their greatness quite openly upon them. The secret is manifest either in certain faculties of genius which they possess, or in certain distinctive contributions which they make to the problems of their time or direct services which they render to its needs. Some men are great in both capacities. Robert Collyer seems to have been great in neither. His achievements



MEMORIAL IN THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH
Dedicated April 11, 1915



are as indubitable as his fame. We only have to ponder for a moment the striking and impressive contrasts of his career—the humble blacksmith at the forge and the honoured minister in the pulpit, the untutored apprentice lad poring over his books by night and the distinguished clergyman and author clad in his scholar's robes at the University of Leeds, the immigrant landing friendless and penniless at the Battery in New York and the pastor and preacher known, acclaimed and beloved of thousands in England and America—to comprehend how great he really was. But when we search for the secret of this greatness in the genius of the man himself, or his relation to his age, we find ourselves baffled. Neither key seems fitted to open the portal to the light.

Thus it would be an extravagant estimate which should declare that Collyer was a "genius" in the ordinary sense of that word. His reputation and influence were gained almost exclusively in the service of a single profession—that of the Christian ministry; but it would be difficult to name any faculty making for eminence in this field, which was his in a superlative degree. He possessed no intellectual powers which would match him with men like Jonathan Edwards and John Henry Newman. He had no

846 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

aptitude for theological speculation and statement such as made William Ellery Channing and Horace Bushnell the founders of important religious movements. He had little of that hot passion for reform which made John Wesley and Theodore Parker as beacon-fires in the night. Had he been granted all the education and training of the schools, he would never have been a scholar like James Martineau or an artist like Frederick Robertson. He was not even an orator, like Beecher, or Spurgeon, or Phillips Brooks. We may run the whole gamut of those supreme qualities which, singly or together, would seem to be essential to success in what was the life-work of Robert Collyer, and no one of them is in him. He simply was not great in these ways.

Equally disappointing is the endeavour to find the secret of Collyer's achievement in his relation to his age—his contribution to its work, or his service of its needs. It cannot be stated with too great emphasis that he was never a man who held himself aloof from those mighty currents of thought and life which swept like a torrent through the nineteenth century. He lurked in no stagnant pool or whirling eddy apart from the main stream. His was an eager mind which craved knowledge of truth, an open heart which

sought contact with life, a free spirit which was not afraid to soar high and far. No man lived more abundantly, intensely, serviceably than he—or indeed more contemporaneously! The Abolition movement in the '50s was as the breath of his nostrils, although he was too young and too crude in those early days to win conspicuous position therein. He plunged into the Civil War with an ardour and devotion which wrote a glorious chapter in his life-record. He was part and parcel of the seething life of Chicago during two decades. All this is true! And yet, on the other hand, when one asks just what Collyer did for his age, either as contributor to or interpreter of its life, the answer, with the single exception of the Civil War period, must be vague and unsatisfactory. In spite of his strenuous and sympathetic living, it would seem as though the story of the tremendous years from 1865 to 1895 could be told without mention of his name, and almost nothing be lost.

Take the intellectual life of the time, for example! Few periods of history have been so remarkable from this point of view as the last half of the nineteenth century. In an interesting autobiographical statement, Dr. Charles William Eliot has said: "The nineteenth century immeasurably surpassed all preceding cen-

348 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

turies in the increase of knowledge, and in the spread of scientific inquiry and of the passion for truth-seeking. . . . (My) observing and thinking life has covered the extraordinary period since 'The Voyage of the Beagle' was published, anesthesia and the telegraph came into use, Herbert Spencer issued his first series of papers on evolution, Kuenen, Robertson Smith and Wellhausen developed and vindicated Biblical criticism, J. S. Mill's 'Principles of Political Economy' appeared . . . the period within which mechanical power came to be widely distributed . . . and all the great fundamental industries of civilised mankind were reconstructed." Now the period of Dr. Collyer's "observing and thinking life" covered this same "extraordinary period." He knew these books and events, and was not a particle afraid of the revolutions which they portended or themselves consummated. But not even as an interpreter, much less as a contributor, did he have share in what was going on. In all his writings, I have noted but one clear reference to the world-shaking evolutionary controversy of his time, and this a playful statement of his ignorance of what it all meant, and his inability, therefore, to discuss it! His sermons make frequent references to the Bible text, but never to the higher criti-

cism which was convulsing the mind of the church.¹ His Sunday evening lectures deal happily with Lamb, and Burns, and Westminster Abbey, but never with Herbert Spencer and Ernest Renan. These things were a part of his life without question, but he seems not to have been part of them. He tasted them, swallowed them, but never digested and assimilated them. One has only to compare his product with that of his colleague, Minot J. Savage, the expounder to great audiences of the best thought of his day, to understand what I am trying to convey.

Another striking example of Dr. Collyer's bafflingly remote position is furnished by the social agitations of his time. His sympathy for any undertaking of social change was instant, and his understanding sure. He saw the great truth of the social causes of poverty a full generation before it found acceptance even at the hands of students. His mind, as well as his heart, went right to the core of the industrial problem. Discussing the struggle between capital and labour, in 1880, in a lecture before the members of his New York congregation, he said: "Who is to blame? Who should take the first step? The employed cannot take it; the em-

¹ On June 6, 1880, he preached a sermon giving welcome to the Revised Version of the Bible.

850 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ployer can. It rests with the man who is in his degree a king, who can say to this man go and he goeth, and to this man come and he cometh. . . . I do not want to stand in that man's shoes who makes a great fortune in utter indifference to those whom he employs, and then leaves a hundred thousand dollars to build churches. . . . (Better) a communism like that of the Master, (which) would go far to stay that of the devil and his angels, which smites our life with perpetual unrest, and may some day end in vast devastation." ² He believed in and advocated woman's rights, as the son of such a mother as his would have to do. "I have nourished the conviction for some years," he said, "that a woman should do anything that she felt called upon to do as the helpmate of a man, not only in the home, but also in the great world, from being a soldier to being a preacher, a priest of the most high God. She must answer for herself for what she does as we men do, and she must be tried by the results that she achieves." He understood what we have now learned to call the social application of religion. "I long to see the church," he said, "more and more a fastness for the forces of humanity, a citadel from which soldiers can only be drawn for the battle of life. . . . If there

² Lecture on "Friend Jacob Bright," delivered May 9, 1880.

is a movement in reform, like the anti-slavery movement now done with, or this for woman's rights still in hand, that means a larger life, a better chance, a victory for equal human rights, I want to see this church stand by that banner, for these are the things by which we become one with Christ who came to give liberty to the captive, the opening of prison doors to them that are bound, and to break every yoke."³ All these ideas and interests were his. His own sure instinct backed by the experience of his early life, led him to the support of every true cause of human betterment. Furthermore, his innate courage compelled him to speak his mind, that no man might be in doubt as to his views. He was at one time charged with being too political in his preaching.⁴ And yet it would be difficult to point out just wherein he was indispensable to any one of the social movements of his time. Comprehending them all, he specialised in none. The story of "the social question," as it is called, has been told many times in recent years, but never once have I seen the mention therein of Robert Collyer's name. In spite of instinct, experience, and sound conviction, there was some inhibition which held him back from

³ Anniversary Sermon, Unity Church, June 20, 1870.

⁴ See back, page 135.

352 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

direct service. Theodore Parker presents just the contrast that we need to emphasise our point.

And then his relation to Unitarianism! Here the story is the same. No man of his generation did more for the Unitarian church than he. His connection with its word and work commended it to thousands of persons who might otherwise never have heard of it, or cared about it. It was an asset of incalculable value to a decidedly unpopular movement, to have among its prophets a man so widely known, highly honoured, and deeply loved as Robert Collyer. The very association of the word Unitarian with the name of this stalwart Yorkshireman, gave to it a fragrance and colour that it could not otherwise have had. It was as though a despised wayside weed were suddenly clothed in loveliness by the presence of an enchanter. Furthermore, Dr. Collyer, while never supremely interested in matters of dogma or denominational organisation, had none of that well-cultivated scorn for sectarian affairs which little men so frequently confuse with spiritual vision. He was never above preaching a straight-from-the-shoulder sermon on Unitarian theology, if occasion demanded; and his time was never so valuable, or so fully occupied, that he could not attend the sessions of local and national conferences. In all things

he was loyal to the church which received him, and ordained him to its free ministry, at the time when his mother-Methodism had turned him out as a wayward son. And yet, in spite of his great distinction as a Unitarian preacher, and a fame which rivalled that of any of his professional colleagues, he was at no time a leader in the church. Only once was he tempted to step forward into the van, and then, as we have seen, he shrank back. No sermon or address of his holds rank as a distinctively Unitarian utterance of prime importance. No Unitarian organisation can be attributed to his suggestion or labour. No movement or event in the denomination is associated with his name. Mr. George Willis Cooke can tell in elaborate detail the history of Unitarianism in America, and find it necessary to speak of him in only a casual way.⁵

Neither in his own genius, therefore, nor yet in his relation to his time and place, is greatness for Robert Collyer to be found. His secret is as little in the one as in the other. And yet he was a great man⁶—great, be it now said, as always certain men are great and yet outside the

⁵ See his "Unitarianism in America," pages 167, 171, 185, 194.

⁶ "He was the greatest man I ever knew."—Dr. Frank Oliver Hall, in "Robert Collyer: A Memorial," page 20.

854 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

categories above defined! For genius in terms of faculty, and achievement in terms of adaptation to contemporary needs, fail after all to exhaust the springs of being. In every age there have been those, endowed with no talents of surpassing worth, and wielding no sword in the battles of the day, who yet have stood supreme among their fellows. They have been possessed of strange and almost mystic charm; their words have fallen like sweet music on the ears; their faces shone as with divine light. Their touch has been healing, and their smile peace. Their very presence has pervaded the world like a fragrant atmosphere. Men have sought them as they seek the sunshine—for warmth, and health, and comfort, and delight. And when their lives have ended and their story been told, and we have asked, What is the secret?—we have found no better answer to our query than *Personality!* These men have been persons in the fullest sense of that great word. They have been perfectly human, in the sense that the human is to be distinguished from the animal through the possession of qualities not physical, nor yet distinctively mental and moral, but spiritual and therefore divine. They have been incarnations of what we mean by God, and arguments for God's real presence in the world. They have shown not

what men can *have*, or what they can *do*, but what they can *be*; and thus given revelation of manhood in its best estate and highest glory. "Having, Doing, and Being," as James Martineau puts it in his analysis of life⁷—and the greatest of these is Being! This last element, it is to be noted, is not exclusive of the other two. Indeed, it is only when the three are combined in fullest measure that we get the supreme men of history—Jesus, Luther, Darwin. But neither is it dependent upon these other two. Like the genius of a Shakespeare, or the sceptre of a Bonaparte, it is sufficient unto itself for greatness. But its presence is manifest not in masterworks of art or deeds of statesmanship, but in fruits of the spirit.

It is here that we find the answer to our question as to the secret of Robert Collyer. Personality is the key which unlocks the portal. What he was as a human soul is the all sufficient and only accurate interpretation of his story. It is this which explains the potent influence which a crude and unlettered blacksmith-apprentice exerted upon the impassive yeomen of the Yorkshire moors. It is this which reveals the mystery of those early friendships in Fewston, Ilkley, Addingham, which endured long years after he

⁷ See "Endeavors After the Christian Life," page 312,

356 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

had crossed the seas, and were transmitted in living beauty to the children and children's children of those who had first known and loved him. It is this which makes plain his unprecedented rise from the anvil in Shoemakertown to the pulpit in Chicago, and the instant and wide appeal of his preaching. Not the message but the man was what fired the Middle West in the first days of the Civil War, and lifted and held him throughout the struggle to high places of public leadership. Not what he said or even did, but what he was, captured the imagination of the country in the week following the great fire in Chicago, and made him the central figure of the disaster. His sermons were, and are, remarkable not for their learning, eloquence, art, homiletical form, but for their simple and lovely disclosures of personality. People flocked to hear him, not merely in the days when he was at the height of his fame and the zenith of his power, but in the days of his great old age when strength had long since departed, because they received from his lips, his smile, his presence, the revelation of a rare and radiant soul. "To the technical critic," writes a contemporary, "his sermons are a mystery, amorphous, insoluble. They submit neither to analysis nor classification. . . . His sermons are not sermons at all. They are

nothing better than irrepressible ingenuous confidences from one man to his neighbours. And unwittingly we here touch the secret of his fascination; for when Robert Collyer opens his lips, all men know that confidences, out from the innermost depths of his brave, sweet life, are coming, with no reservations; fresh, simple, helpful, cheering, touched with a holy reverence and a fine wisdom of men and life, and the people feed on such confidences, finding them wonderfully invigourating and restful." All of which means that in his preaching, as in every other relation of his life, this man was himself! He hid nothing, disguised nothing, pretended nothing. And it is because this self of his, if we may so express it, was of a beauty, strength and purity of spirit seldom seen, that he attained to fame and influence. Robert Collyer was not a great scholar, a great author, a great artist, a great orator, a great administrator, not even a great preacher. He was a great man! Much more can be said of him than this. Much more has been said of him in this book. But in our present endeavour to penetrate to the heart of things, this is enough. The divine quality of his manhood is all we need to note. For it is this which was the secret of his life.

858 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

In any analysis of Dr. Collyer's personality, it is of the tender and gentle aspects of his nature that we are first of all inclined to think. Especially is this the case with those of us who knew him only in his later and declining years. We recall his sweetness, as expressed in the wonderful smile, the warm hand-clasp, the loving word, as perhaps his most impressive characteristic. We shall do him grievous wrong, however, if we declare this to be the central feature of his spirit. I am convinced, after five years of intimate personal association, and another five years of careful study of his life, that we shall not really understand this man until we come to see that his basic characteristic was strength more than sweetness, power more than patience, "toughness" more than "tenderness," to borrow the famous phrase of William James.

Robert Collyer was fundamentally a strong man. This was manifest at once in his physique, which was that of a veritable giant—tall, massive, muscular, huge-boned. Nor did this outward frame belie the inward stature of his soul. It was a strong man who resisted the temptations of his apprentice-years, and kept himself as pure as his mother's heart. It was a strong man who fronted the tragic sorrow of his youth, and stayed the havoc that it was working in his soul. It was

a strong man who crossed the waters to these unknown shores, and started life anew. It was a strong man who refused to sell his soul when he found himself a heretic, and departed from his mother-church without so much as a friendly word from the brethren to bid him Godspeed. It was a strong man who left the anvil, and entered upon the task of a ministry for which he had received no teaching beyond his rude experience as a circuit-preacher. It was a strong man who in war-days preached the sermon denouncing the suppression of the *Chicago Times*. It was a strong man who said "Nay" to the summons to Theodore Parker's Boston congregation. It was a strong man who stood upon the ashes of the "holy and beautiful house" which had been "burned with fire" in Chicago, and with waste and terror all about him, conquered the despair of his own soul, and led his assembled people in prayers of praise and love to God. It was a strong man who beheld the slow decay of his vital powers without flinching, and passed over his tasks and honours to other hands without bitterness or envy.

Even in small things, he rang as true as the anvil on which he smote the glowing iron. Witness, for example, his bold fronting of Mr. Moody when, on the way to Pittsburg Landing,

360 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

he heard the great revivalist declare that they were going to save the souls of the soldiers who might otherwise die in their sins.⁸ Witness the amusing tale narrated by Rev. Cyrus W. Heizer, of an incident at Cornell University, where at the close of a service in Sage Chapel, he started to give out the last hymn, and had read only a few lines when he discovered that it was most unexpectedly orthodox in its theology. Stopping abruptly, he paused for a moment, and then said with almost savage emphasis, "Ye can sing this hymn if ye want to, but I won't read it," and sat down without another word. Significant also in its way, was Collyer's instant refusal of an offer of one thousand dollars to officiate at a marriage which involved a questionable divorce proceeding. There was no weakness, no fear, no compromise, no surrender in this man. He was "clear grit" all through. There was boldness in him, to dare the most uncertain adventures. There was granite, to withstand the mightiest assaults of chance and change. A valiant spirit matched the tough fibre of his Yorkshire breeding.

But strength of mind and soul, basic as it was within him, was not all. A certain "grace" of gentleness and peace, supremely the characteris-

⁸ See above, Vol. I, page 271.

tic of his later years, was always present in his soul, and from the beginning made up much of the potent charm of his personality. It was this element of ineffable tenderness and pity which softened the roughness of his nature as the heather softened with beauty the dark stretches of Denton Moor. That there were crudities, even severities, latent in his being, was perhaps inevitable in one so born and reared, and dowered with such measure of native force. He could speak harsh words—as when a faithful attendant at Unity, who missed a Sunday, met his pastor on Monday morning, and beginning “Brother Collyer, I wasn’t at church yesterday,” was about to tell him why, when Collyer broke in gruffly, “Who cares?” and passed on. He could do strangely ungracious things—as when, at the installation of his successor at Unity, he announced that a reception would be given him in the church the next evening and he wanted to see everybody, and then departed for New York at three o’clock that afternoon, leaving not so much as an apology behind.⁹ Twice at least he revealed an almost unaccountable hardness—once when he momentarily joined in the cry for ruthless vengeance upon the slayers of Abraham Lincoln, and again when he refused to join Jane Addams,

⁹ See comment below, page 365 (note).

362 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Henry Demarest Lloyd and others in the movement for pardon of the Chicago anarchists. On this latter occasion he said, "I was asked to sign a petition of clemency, and to write to Governor Oglesby, who is a personal friend of mine, but I declined. I could not conscientiously do anything but let the law take its course. The time has come when we must stamp out this plague of the social order and prevent its further growth."¹⁰ "They must be made to bite the hammer," was his comment in such cases! These utterances and deeds, however, were never expressive of his essential nature. The rough and hard was there within him, without question, but it was so mixed with purity of heart and gentleness of spirit, that it became as substance transformed. The wells of tenderness which he describes as flowing so full and clear within his mother's heart, had poured their tide into his own, and filled him with "all benediction and grace." The old stone cottage brought to him its peace, the birds their music, the summer sky its loveliness. "It must have been that flowers grew near the young man's smithy," says an eulogist.¹¹ The rough

¹⁰ See sermon preached at the Church of the Messiah, November 13, 1887.

¹¹ Editorial in *The Nation* (New York), December 5, 1912.

iron of his soul was tempered. "Out of the strong came forth sweetness."

This aspect of Collyer's nature had its occasions of whimsical or jocular expression. Like Lincoln, he could point a moral, adorn a tale, sum up an argument, relieve a situation, with a story racy of the soil, and as "pat" as it was humorous. He dearly loved a bit of fun which did no harm and added to the gaiety of living. Thus in the autumn of 1882, when the National Unitarian Conference had held its session in Saratoga in the same week with the state convention of the Republican party of New York, Collyer solemnly announced as his sermon subject on the Sunday following, "The Saratoga Convention," and packed his church to the doors with a crowd of curiosity-seekers and politicians who had to listen patiently to an exposition of Unitarianism as represented at its recent gathering. Nothing pleased him more than to play a part when chance threw him into the midst of unexpected drama. A somewhat flashy and loud-voiced actor once mistook him in a street-car for Denman Thompson, and entered upon a flow of professional conversation. Collyer kept up his end manfully, until asked "where he was playing now," to which he replied with utter imperturbability, "Church of the Messiah, Park

Avenue and 84th Street!" Even more delightful was the occasion when, on his way to Unity Church one Sunday evening, he was accosted by a stranger. "Do you know 'Bob' Collyer?" he was asked. "Oh, yes," he replied, "I know Bob pretty well." "Heard him preach, I s'pose?" "Oh, yes, quite a number of times. My family have a pew in his church." "Well, mister, what do you think of him?" "Think of him? Humph! Not so much as some folks seem to. Still, I don't want to say anything against him. He's always been kind to my wife and children! He's a pretty fair sort of preacher, too; and he behaves himself through the week like a gentleman. Never gets drunk or in jail." "Well," said the stranger, "I'm a-goin' to hear him to-night. I've been told such great things of him, as the chap who quit shoeing horses to go a-preachin' that, seein' as I'm in town over Sunday, I thought I'd try him on." "Very good, sir," was the rejoinder, "I hope you'll like him; he doesn't always please me, though." Whereupon the two entered the door of Unity, the one to be ushered to a pew, the other with huge and now unconcealed merriment to enter the pulpit.

Collyer's deep human tenderness found truer and in the end lovelier expression in other ways. Supremely characteristic was his acute sensibil-

ity. On the one hand, this took the form of a shyness which was one of the abiding embarrassments of his life. He never went into a pulpit or upon a platform without feeling a nervous fear of his audience. He could not go to a function of any kind, in which he was to be a conspicuous figure, without fighting a haunting desire to run away. Sometimes this overcame him, as on one notable occasion of a dinner at the residence of Mr. Carnegie, when he came fleeing home like a frightened girl and spent the evening puffing angrily at one cigar after another in sheer disgust at his own frailty.¹² Again, this sensibility revealed itself in fits of depression to which he was subject all his life; in England, invariably in the autumn. His sunny disposition was no freak of temperament, but in large measure an achievement. Still again his sensibility appeared in certain reserves within his conscious experience, which he kept inviolate throughout his life. No one was ever admitted into his abiding sorrow over the death of his youth's first love. What he suffered and long endured as a result of the Chicago fire was never told, even to the members of his family; and the

¹² Was this the explanation of his failure to appear at the reception in Chicago? See back, page 361. In all probability, yes. This was another case of panic.

366 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

fulness of the spiritual tragedy might never have been known, had it not disclosed itself in alterations of inner mood and faculty, and in such an outward event as the removal to New York. Where emotion was deep and permanent, there were hidden areas—holies of holies which were so sacred as not to tolerate the presence of any soul but his very own. And these areas were not few, for the profoundness and immediacy of his emotional reactions were still another sign of the extreme sensibility of his nature. The death of his loved ones tore his heart, and left wounds never to be healed. The loss of his license as a Methodist lay-preacher blackened for the moment the whole firmament of his life. The Civil War kindled a flame which consumed him like a conflagration. The Chicago disaster broke his heart, while the fires were yet raging through the city. The voices of children lifted in song would move him to tears. One spray of heather from the moors would send a quiver of delight throughout his mighty frame. Endeavour to conceal or conquer his swift emotion was more than once the explanation of apparent abruptness or surliness in his manner. Thus a few days before his departure for Europe in 1871, Collyer was tendered a reception by the adoring congregation of Unity Church. At the

height of the festivities, one of the trustees stepped forward and presented, in the name of the assembled parishioners, a handsome gift to the minister and his wife. All waited in silence for the word of response in appreciation of the happy remembrance; the spokesman's address had been full of praise and affection, and the friendly faces all about were aglow with expectant delight. What was the surprise and mortification, however, when Collyer grumbled, "It's all right, I guess, if Mother likes it," and turned abruptly away. Chided in after days for his discourtesy, he said, "It was that or nothing. I couldn't have spoken a word of thanks without breaking down completely." On the Sunday following the Martinique catastrophe, I made mention of what had happened as we sat together waiting for the service. "Don't, DON'T, DON'T," he interrupted, with rising intensity of inflection. "Don't speak of it! I'm old, John, I can't stand it." And the great head fell forward upon his breast, while he fought the battle for self-control. Often, at some story or sight of suffering, he would exclaim, "Oh, my back," the thrills of reaction up and down his spine being so acute as to be painful. I have thought frequently since August, 1914, of what the Great War would have meant

368 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

to him. I am glad that he did not live to see it, for its horror would have killed him and sent him into the beyond in darkness.

Sensitive he was to the points at once of ecstasy and agony—and for that reason the tenderest of men! What could be more touching than his devotion to his mother! How he clung to old friends and places in the Yorkshire dales, and returned to them in gladness again and yet again! How was his home a living thing, so that when it fell in ashes as in Chicago, or into ruins as in New York, he spoke of a “soul” as having “fled”! And in his relation with his fellows, how did his understanding and compassionate heart draw all men unto him, and bind them to him as with hoops of steel! One likes to think of the brave lads and bonnie lassies who must have gathered around the anvil of this stout-hearted blacksmith in the early days, to hear the blithe ring of his voice as he talked of heather-bloom and throstles. One likes to think of how the simple peasants and labourers and mill-hands of the Yorkshire hamlets assembled on the Sabbath to listen to the earnest words of the young man who preached God’s truth just for the joy of preaching it. It is a charming picture which we have of the immigrant and his wife landing in loneliness on these shores, and straightway sur-

rounded by friends as a new flower by bees. And nothing in my life is lovelier than the memory of the men and women, young and old, rich and poor, sick and well, who clustered about him in his old age, and sought the joy of one fitting smile or one passing handclasp. It was the warmth and sweetness of this great soul which drew men to him. It was the tenderness of his big heart that won and held the sympathies of all who met him. There was healing in his touch. The great hand, which could weld the heated iron on the anvil, could touch the fevered brow of illness with infinite gentleness and quiet. The ringing voice which could stir multitudes, could speak so softly that a babe would smile in wonder. More than once I have seen him enter the house of death, and by his winsome smile, bring "the peace that passeth understanding." Strong he was, but tender also! "A powerful man, but his power was not like the rushing river or the tempestuous wind; it was like the power of the spring sun which shining upon the earth makes it bud and blossom and bear fruit."¹³

One further quality must be noted, if we would have any complete picture of this personality which was the secret of Collyer's greatness. I

¹³ Frank Oliver Hall, in "Robert Collyer: A Memorial," page 21.

370 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

refer to his simplicity, which was to me his crowning virtue. Always was he natural, normal, spontaneous—simple! Never was he spoiled by artificialities, or captivated by frills and fancies. He was oblivious, if not contemptuous, of all that was unreal. Nothing could be more charming than the perfectly frank delight with which he received the many honours showered upon him—nothing more naïve than his joy in other people's joy in himself. His unconventionality was a constant source of amusement, sometimes of embarrassment. The story of his seeing Mr. P. T. Barnum in his crowded church and inviting him to come forward, and in answer to the great showman's silent protest, declaring loudly, "I always have a front seat at your show, you shall have one at mine"—this has already achieved immortality. Equally amusing was the occasion in one of the last years of his life, when he could not make out a certain formidable proper name in a pulpit notice which he had been asked to read. In vain he halted and gazed—the letters would not form themselves into a word. Then, with entire coolness and characteristic abruptness, he looked down to the family pew just in front of the pulpit, and to the vast amusement of the congregation, said to

his daughter-in-law: "Gertrude, what's that word?"¹⁴

This simplicity, so evident in his personal traits, became a quality of rare merit in his English style as speaker and writer. Every competent judge has borne enthusiastic testimony to the perfection in this regard of his literary manner. "Go and hear Robert Collyer preach," a Columbia professor advised his students; "he is the only living man who speaks our language in its Anglo-Saxon purity and power." His tongue wove no oriental or mediæval spells. It woke no memories of Rome or Greece. The pompous and ornate, even the grand, sonorous and eloquent, never came within its compass. Had he thought at all, he would have been contemptuous of such borrowed trappings; as it was, he simply knew them not. He used to the end of his days that native language of old England which he caught in childhood from his mother's lips, and later found in classic form in Bunyan, Shakespeare and the King James Bible. Simplicity was the note of this speech, as of the people who conceived it. At bottom it was austere and cold, like an English moor. But heather grew upon the Yorkshire uplands in the August sun, and beauty flowered upon the Saxon tongue

¹⁴ The word was "Paracelsus."

372 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

when poets spoke. The virtue of Dr. Collyer's style was its revival of Puritan simplicity three hundred years after that simplicity had passed; but its miracle was the union of this simplicity with warmth, colour, variety, caprice, and indubitable passion. His style was essentially that of the poet. Had he given himself to poetry, he would have "made a name," as witness not merely his two hymns, but his splendid ballads, "Under the Snow," "Saxon Grit," and "The Legend of the Two Kings."¹⁵ But his prose was itself poetry. It came wafted from his lips like the songs of birds, the fragrance of spring flowers, or a fresh breeze from the purpled slopes of Wharfedale. The people listened to his words as yeomen to a minstrel-song, or children to a tale of Hereward. They came to hear him first of all because they knew that they would be entertained and charmed by what the speaker said and the way he said it; and they went away, almost without knowing it, instructed, purified, and inspired.

And not only his life and speech, but his religion as well possessed the pure essence of simplicity. His spiritual beliefs were as unquestioning and genuine as those received by a child at its parent's knee. Through all his long theo-

¹⁵ See "Clear Grit," pages 313-328.

logical pilgrimage, the content of his faith remained the same; at the end it was only what he had imbibed from the well-spring of his mother's heart in the beginning. God the Father was as real to him as the stars upon which he looked at night. Immortality was to him as certain a thing as the coming dawn. Nothing could be more sublime than his unfaltering trust in the goodness of the world. He did not reason about these fundamental verities. Argument upon such matters only surprised and pained him. Speculation was as alien from his mind as hatred from his heart. He simply believed, that is all—"accepted the universe," as Margaret Fuller put it—and gave himself gladly to the play and business of the day. If it be true that we "can in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, except (we) become as little children," then we have all the assurance that we need as to the destiny of this great soul!

Such was the personality, and hence the secret, of Robert Collyer! He was strong, like a man; tender, like a woman; simple, like a child. He was human pre-eminently and all around. This does not mean, as it might mean, that he was ordinary, commonplace, primitive. It does not mean that there were all kinds of faults and weaknesses within him for which we must find

374 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

extenuation. He had the failings as well as the virtues of native, unspoiled humanity, of course. But as he went on living, these failings were caught up and absorbed by the higher and nobler attributes of his nature, and he became human, therefore, in a glorified, transcendent sense. He had that rare combination of basic spiritual qualities which makes the great *man*, as distinguished from every other form of greatness. Men never looked upon him to marvel at his power, or stand in awe of his accomplishment. The famous personalities of his time—Emerson, Longfellow, Thoreau, Whittier, O. W. Holmes, E. E. Hale, Lucretia Mott, Julia Ward Howe, Andrew T. White, and many others—with whom he associated on terms of easy and happy intimacy, sought in him no stores of learning or faculties of genius. All recognised his unquestioned ability, and rejoiced at the fresh romance of his career. But what brought men to him in the beginning, and held them to him at the end, was himself. What he was—that was the great thing! Men saw in him what they instantly believed in, loved, and wanted to possess. They beheld in him themselves as they might have been, or might indeed still be. This strong, tender, simple man was at once the prophecy and the fulfilment of humanity at its best. What

wonder that men took example of him while he was present, and now that he is gone, still earnestly desire him!

And all this great personality focussed itself in preaching! There was much more, to be sure, than the preacher in Robert Collyer's life. For twenty-two years, he was a blacksmith, "sitting by the anvil, and considering the unwrought iron." After mounting to the pulpit, he was at various times and in sundry ways an author, lecturer, army nurse, public servant. Always he was a pastor in the lovely and intimate way which is now becoming uncommon among clergymen so distinguished and active as was he. In all the human experiences of life, both glad and sad, he was a true minister to his people. He was always at home in their homes; here at his lovable best—and never shy! But he was pre-eminently the preacher, after all! Long before he laid down the hammer for the last time he knew that preaching was his business; and all through his professional life, he found it his abiding joy. "I hear ministers," he said,¹⁶ "intimate now and then that they are looking for their reward hereafter, and so are not getting it here; but I can sincerely say that preaching, and all

¹⁶ In Anniversary Sermon, Unity Church, June 2, 1870.

376 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

that belongs to it, is to me its own exceeding great reward. It was so when I would walk in England a score of miles, preach thrice, and be back to my work on Monday morning, paying all my own expenses. It was so in Pennsylvania, where I preached nine years for the pure love of it, and made my own living. It is only the more so in Chicago, where I can give my whole time to it, and I trust my whole heart." The impulse to speak was on him, as the impulse to sing is on the birds; and his speech, like their song, became the end, as it was the crowning glory, of life. His fount of inspiration was no cistern, laboriously constructed where waters would not of themselves flow; it was a spring, as his wife well knew and said, whose living waters poured from the very heart.

It was this central source of Collyer's preaching which made it not only an inevitable medium of self-expression, but also the only door which ever opened upon the inner sanctuaries of his being. I have spoken of his shyness, and of his deep reserve. There were great reaches of his life which no one was ever allowed to explore but himself. But such glimpses as came to outside eyes upon these hidden and sacred corridors, were given not in personal communions however intimate, but strangely enough—and yet not

strangely, perhaps!—in the utterances of the pulpit. “He could most show his soul in public.”¹⁷ In his sermons, therefore, may be found, if at all, this whole man about whom we have been speaking. Here is his delight in nature and his love of men, his fondness for old associations and familiar ways, his capacity for friendship, his visions of the beautiful, his relish of wholesome, virtuous, healthy things. Here is his courage for truth and right, his sweet compassion for frailty and suffering, his abiding and all pervasive simplicity. Here above all is that mystic strain within him which was so wonderful and so elusive! Here perhaps we come most near to the secret places of his life.

In my sermon preached in memory of Dr. Collyer, on the Sunday following his burial, I affirmed as my last word of characterisation, that Robert Collyer was a Seer. By this I meant one who can see the things which are “unseen and eternal.” The Seer believes in God not because such belief is rational, but because he himself has verily seen God face to face. He awaits the immortal life as he awaits the morrow, not because he has persuaded himself of its reality by processes of logic, but because his soul has actu-

¹⁷ Merle St. Croix Wright, in “Robert Collyer: A Memorial,” page 17.

378 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

ally gone into the invisible and beheld its wonders. He trusts that men are good, not as a reasonable principle but as a moral experience. And always, in all he says and does, he feels himself in the hands of Providence. It is in this sense that Robert Collyer was a Seer. We have already seen how his simple faith in God and the soul was founded on just such spiritual intuitions as these of which I speak. We need only cast our minds back over the story of his life, to see how often he felt himself directly guided by, and thus in touch with, the divine. When he came to America, when he left for Chicago, when he turned to New York, his way was given to him and he simply followed.

It is this mystic strain within him, which explains, I think, not only his own religious experience, but the similar experience which he inspired, as it were, in other men. Dr. Collyer throughout his life exerted that strange and wonderful influence over those who came into his presence, which is perhaps the one unanswerable proof of the reality of the spirit. Men whom the world found cold and cruel, he found only beautiful—and they *were* beautiful with him! Men who were as merciless as pirates in politics and business, became as little children beneath

his transforming influence. Men of conflicting interests and opinions were quickly reconciled in his presence; all his life he was being called upon to find, or *be*, a common meeting-ground. The lovely secrets of men's hearts which they themselves had never known, he revealed to them, and thus transformed their lives. Once at least in his long career, he performed a miracle.¹⁸ Some years after his partial retirement in New York, a woman spoke to him after a Sunday service, and asked for a brief interview. She began by saying, "You don't remember me, Dr. Collyer, but I remember you and shall never forget you." Then she told her story, and his part in it, as follows: "Many years ago you married me in Chicago. At that time I was the keeper of a house of prostitution, and my husband had just finished a term in state's prison. When we came to you, we had never thought of anything but continuing in the old life. But something in your smile, the way you spoke to us, your word of prayer—what was it? I cannot say! But when we left you, everything was changed. To-day, sir, my husband is a Congregational minister in Connecticut, and I am the mother of his three children."

¹⁸ This remarkable story was told me by Dr. Collyer himself.

380 THE LIFE AND LETTERS

Robert Collyer's life was long, full, happy, very beautiful. Like the lives of all great men, it had wonder in it, and glowing romance, and places of strange mystery. His youth was given the hardness that makes tough fibre in flesh and spirit, and the grace as well that saves the soul from death. He won his place by labour, effort and unconquerable faith, and looked upon a fame which had been achieved and not conferred. He was left in the end a meed of serene and quiet years, when he could "sit in the sun," a figure of unmatched loveliness, and welcome

" . . . that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends."

He was granted transcendent joys, and was not denied sorrow. He tasted agony, but never fear; clung to the old with passionate devotion, but ever gave welcome to the new. He saw great days, served liberating causes, was himself a potent influence for good. The applause of men was never strange to him, their blessings were his crown. Like Enoch of old, he "walked with God as with a dear friend, voice answering to voice, hand touching hand, face reflecting face, from the beginning to the end of his life." As with Enoch, also, death cast "no more shadow on

his spirit than if it were the spirit of a yearling child." His secret was the secret of the stars and winds. God lived close to him, as to the flowers; and now that he is dead, they are not divided.



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APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGY

- Born—December 8, 1823.
A Child Labourer—1831-1837.
A Blacksmith Apprentice at Ilkley—1837-1844.
A Master Blacksmith at Ilkley—1844-1850.
First Marriage—June, 1846.
Death of First Wife—February 1, 1849.
Conversion to Methodism—1849.
Second Marriage—April 9, 1850.
Departure for America—April 13, 1850.
Blacksmith in Pennsylvania—1850-1859.
Withdrawal of License as Methodist Lay-Preacher—
January, 1859.
Arrival in Chicago—February 24, 1859.
Ordination to Unitarian Ministry—May, 1859.
Minister of Unity Church—1859-1879.
Enters on Work of Sanitary Commission in Civil
War—July, 1861.
Call to Theodore Parker Congregation, Boston—
December 1, 1862.
Second Call to Parker Congregation, Boston—De-
cember 3, 1863.

Call to Second Church in Brooklyn—March, 1864.

First Visit to Europe—1865.

Dedication of New Unity Church—June 20, 1869.

Second Visit to Europe—1871.

Chicago Fire—October 8-9, 1871.

Dedication of Restored Unity Church—December 3, 1873.

First Call to Church of the Messiah, New York—September 21, 1874.

Third Visit to Europe—1878.

Second Call to Church of the Messiah, New York—June 9, 1879.

Arrival in New York—September 28, 1879.

Fourth Visit to Europe—1883.

Fifth Visit to Europe—1886.

Death of Second Wife—October 21, 1890.

Sixth Visit to Europe—1892.

Associate Ministry with Dr. M. J. Savage—1896-1906.

Seventh Visit to Europe—1898.

The Strathmore Fire—February 26, 1901.

Pastor-Emeritus—1903-1912.

Mr. Holmes Minister of the Church of the Messiah—February, 1907.

Eighth Visit to Europe—1907.

Lit. D.—Victoria University, Leeds—1907.

D. D.—Meadville Theological School—1911.

Death—November 30, 1912.

Burial—December 3, 1912.

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INDEX

A

- Abolitionism—I. 161, 165; R. C.'s relation to, 172-176, 298-301.
- Abolitionists—I. 174, 177.
- Adams, President, of Cornell—I. 49; R. C.'s letter to, 50, 51.
- Addingham—I. 86, 93, 142, 198, 227; II. 2, 57, 185, 196, 250, 355.
- Alger, Rev. William R.—II. 214.
- American Unitarian Association—I. 193; II. 42, 79, 80, 166, 177, 216, 310.
- Anti-Slavery Movement—*See* Abolitionism.
- Armitage, Ann, R. C.'s second wife—I. 99, 104, 112, 119, 129, 138, 179, 185, 198; II. 15, 88, 91, 193, 240, 253; marriage to R. C., I. 99, 100; illnesses, 111, 112, 137, II. 223, 252, 258; character, I. 117; II. 260; devotion to R. C., I. 100, 181, 182, 185, 211; helpfulness, 200, 201, 240, 253; death, II. 259.
- Appomattox—I. 190, II. 48.

B

- Baker, Alice—II. 4, 14, 69, 89, 93, 138, 170, 174.
- Baldwin, William H.—II. 267.
- Ballou, Hosea—I. 151, 223.
- Batchelor, Rev. George—II. 189, 308.
- Bates, Eli—II. 74, 98, 250.
- Beecher, Henry Ward—I. 190, II. 20, 122, 125, 127, 345.
- Bellows, Henry W.—I. 8, 218, 221, II. 11, 79, 201, 210, 211, 216; and Sanitary Commission, I. 251, 254, II. 48; preaches sermon at dedication of Unity, 110.
- Benevolent Fraternity of Churches—I. 194.
- Berry St. Conference—R. C.'s paper before—II. 263.
- Bible, the—I. 37, 39, 81, 101, 124, 132, 150, 162, 163; II. 125, 371.
- Birch, John, master blacksmith—I. 4, 59, 61, 66, 73, 99, II. 46; R. C. apprenticed to, I. 54; drinking habits, 60, 78; death, 74, 78, 79.
- Blake, James Vila—II. 36.
- Bland, Flesher—I. 81, 141, 143,

- 149, 195, 199, 202, 226, 238, 257, II. 2, 11, 42, 47, 48, 60, 78, 87, 88, 89, 92, 93, 138, 141, 166, 171, 173, 175, 177, 180, 182, 185, 188, 190, 191, 193, 194, 196, 224, 226, 235, 237, 241, 242, 243, 245, 249, 250, 251, 252, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 260, 261, 262, 263, 265, 271, 273, 280, 283, 284, 286, 287, 292.
- Blubberhouses, R. C.'s early home at—I. 4, 5, 14, 33, 34, 43, 46, 47, 53, 54, 76, 78, 82, 145, 306; description of, 27.
- Bolton Abbey—II. 2, 59, 194, 238.
- Bolton Bridge—I. 27.
- Books and Reading, R. C.'s love of—I. 38, 39, 67-73, 122-129, II. 3, 4, 6, 8, 92, 282, 297, 299, 315.
- Bosler, Charles—I. 118, 121.
- Boston—I. 205, 206, 209, II. 35, 36, 42, 43, 91, 284.
- Bowring, Sir John—II. 144.
- Bradley, Mr. Luther N.—II. 303.
- Briggs, Rev. George W.—I. 205.
- Brigham, Rev. C. H.—I. 205.
- British and Foreign Unitarian Association—R. C.'s sermon at 46th anniversary of, I. 2, II. 47, 142, 143.
- Brontë, Charlotte—I. 18, 128, 137, 198.
- Brooklyn—II. 37, 38, 42, 208, 339.
- Brooks, Phillips—II. 129, 345.
- Browning, Mrs. E. B.—I. 46, II. 10.
- Brundage, Rev. W. M.—II. 338.
- Bunyan, John—I. 39, 59, 67, 127, II. 133, 251.
- Burns, Robert—I. 39, 72, 127, II. 134, 285, 349.

C

- Caesar, Julius—I. 15.
- Calvin, John—II. 116.
- Cavaliers—I. 16.
- Chadwick, Rev. J. W.—II. 247, 266, 280, 308, 337; quoted, 36, 344.
- Chalmers, Thomas—I. 83, II. 129.
- Channing, William Ellery—I. 83, 150, 152, 163, II. 200, 247, 346.
- Channing, William Henry—I. 194.
- Chicago—I. 141, 164, 183, 184, 190, 202, 206, 211, 217, 227, 238, II. 5, 17, 38, 48, 69, 77, 95, 97, 117, 167, 231, 236, 356; R. C. arrives at, I. 185; history of, 187-189; R. C.'s relation to, 198, 241, II. 16, 35, 164; geography of, I. 207, 208; in Civil War time, 245, 246, 248, 249; the fire, 148-155, 366, 368; farewell to R. C., 227-229.
- Church of the Messiah, New York—II. 177, 206, 209, 213, 231, 276, 335; history of, 199-

- 206; erection of present building, 204; debt, 204, 205; first call to R. C., 207; payment of debt, 215; second call to R. C., 217; R. C. becomes minister of, 218; relations to, 232, 267-271, 272, 309, 313, 314; prosperity of under R. C., 233, 234; reception to R. C. on 70th birthday, 266; calls Dr. Savage, 275; reception to R. C. on 80th birthday, 308; calls Mr. Holmes, 316; service in memory of R. C., 338; memorials to R. C., 341.
- Circuit preaching by R. C. in Yorkshire—I. 85-96; in Pennsylvania, 130-137.
- Civil War—I. 190, 243-245, 261, 262, 279, 280, 283, 284, II. 82, 94; R. C.'s sermons on, I. 280-294; R. C.'s relation to, 309-312, II. 16, 18, 39, 345, 356, 366.
- Clarke, Dr. James Freeman—I. 218, 221, II. 10, 21, 80, 162, 206, 247.
- "Clear Grit," R. C.'s book—I. 42, II. 310.
- "Clear Grit," R. C.'s lecture—II. 183.
- Cliffords, old English family—I. 16.
- Cohen, Mrs.—II. 275, 286, 287, 297, 298, 306, 315.
- Colbeck and Wilks, employers of R. C.'s parents—I. 4.
- Collier, Robert Laird—II. 78.
- Collyer, Annie, R. C.'s daughter—II. 15, 138, 174, 191, 233, 240, 270; birth, I. 113; death, II. 252.
- Collyer, Emma (Mrs. Hosmer), R. C.'s daughter—II. 14, 15, 138, 174, 254, 257, 259, 279, 283, 284, 291, 320; birth, I. 113; engagement, 191; death of Mr. Hosmer, 259.
- Collyer, Harriett, R. C.'s mother—I. 14, 43, 44, 46, 56, 67, 77, 100, 101, 122, II. 57, 60; birth, I. 8; work-house girl, 4; marriage, 5; appearance and character, 8-13; death, 12, II, 188; her housekeeping and care of her children, I. 30-32; religious practises, 36-38; story telling to children, 37.
- Collyer, Harriett (Mrs. Eastman), R. C.'s daughter—II. 15, 138, 174, 191, 240, 262, 295; birth, I. 113; marriage, II. 241; death, 308.
- Collyer, John, R. C.'s brother—I. 31.
- Collyer, Maria, R. C.'s sister—I. 31.
- Collyer, Martha, R. C.'s sister—I. 31, II. 280.
- Collyer, Norman, R. C.'s grandson—II. 264, 298, 305, 307.
- Collyer, Robert, R. C.'s grandfather—I. 7.
- Collyer, Robert, birth—I. 6; christening, 14; early childhood, 29-32; at school, 32-34; at church and Sunday school,

- 84-86, 65; influence of home and parents on, 37; love of books, 38, 39, 67-73; a child-laborer, 46-53; apprenticed to the anvil, 54-58; at the Ilkley "smithy," 59, 60; character and habits, 61-66; friends, 66, 67; makes the Iron Gates, 74; a master-smith, 74; first marriage, to Harriett Watson, 75; birth of son, Samuel, 76; death of wife, 79; desolation, 79, 80; conversion to Methodism, 81-83; licensed to preach, 85; experiences as circuit-preacher, 86-92; early success as preacher, 92, 93; decision to emigrate, 95-98; second marriage, to Ann Armitage, 99; departure from Liverpool, 100; arrival at New York, 104; first experiences in U. S., 105-107; in Philadelphia, 108, 109; work at Shoemakertown, 109; early trials and joys, 109-112; poverty, 112, 118, 119; children, 113; friends, 117, 118; books and reading, 122-129; circuit preaching in Pennsylvania, 129-135; happiness and success, 136-139; theological heresies, 142-144; development away from Methodism, 144-148; doubts about eternal punishment, 149, 155; first discovery of evolution theories, 153; influence of James and Lucretia Mott, 156-161; a new attitude toward the Bible, 162; heresy, 164; Dr. Furness and Abolitionism, 165-170; acceptance of Garrisonian program, 172-174; activity in anti-slavery cause, 174-176; sermon in Dr. Furness's pulpit, 177; tried and dismissed for heresy, 178, 179; loneliness and dismay, 179-182; accepts post as minister-at-large of First Unitarian Church in Chicago, 184; arrives in Chicago, 185; at work as minister-at-large, 195-201; preaches at First Church, 203; invited to preach at the new Unity Church, 210; called to be minister of Unity, 216; accepts, 218; ordained at Western Conference meeting, 219; called to missionary work, and declines, 220, 221; early years at Unity, 222-234; anxieties, 235-237; sermons, 238; growing success, 242; war sermon after firing on Sumter, 246; great activity in early days of the War, 250; joins the Sanitary Commission, 254; along the Potomac, 255, 256; in Missouri, 257; at Fort Donelson, 261-270; at Pittsburgh Landing, 270, 271; encounter with Dwight L. Moody, 271-273; in Kansas, 273, 274; in Chicago and Camp Douglas, 275-277; sermon after Bull

Run, 279-283; sermon after Peninsula Campaign, 283-288; depression over the War, 288; Boston oration attacking administration, 289, 294; sermon in defence of *Chicago Times*, 294-296; attitude on slavery issue, 297-301; views on war, 301-304; attitude toward Lincoln, 304-309; great services and distinction in War period, 309-312, II. 17, 18; personal aspects of War time, II. 1-5, 14-16; acquaintance begun with Jasper Douthit, 5; developing friendship for Douthit, 6-11; love for, and discussions with, Flesher Bland, 11-14; great success at Unity Church, 18, 19; call to Theodore Parker's congregation, 20-25; declines, 26; second call to Music Hall, 81; declines again, 32; wisdom in declining, 35-37; call to Second Unitarian Church, Brooklyn, 37; declines, 38; first voyage to Europe, 41-70; early journeyings in U. S., 42-43; in England, 52-60; in Switzerland, 60-68; welcome back to Unity, 70; parish life and work, 71-79; views on poverty, 75, 76, 350; denominational activities, 79-81; early lecturing, 81-84; first writings, 85, 86; publication of "Nature and Life," 87; and "The Life That Now Is," 87;

the building of the new Unity church, 95-106; address at laying of corner-stone, 98, 100; devotion to the undertaking, 103-105; triumph at dedication, 111-114; high tide of Chicago ministry, 116, 117; zenith of personal power and popularity, 119; a Sunday in the pulpit, 121-137; his conduct of worship, 123; prayers, 125; preaching, 126-137; in the Sunday school, 137; home life, 138-141; second voyage to England, 143-146; sermon before British and Foreign Unitarian Association, 143; on the continent, 145; return, 146; experiences in Chicago fire, 148-155; loss of home, 150; of church, 151; temporary breakdown, 153; public service in disaster, 155; Sunday service on the ruins of Unity, 157-163; influence of this achievement, 163, 164; gifts from friends, 165, 166; the \$16 from the Rivington St. boys, 167; letter to, 167; the horse-shoe for Cornell, 168; the books from Sir Edwin Lawrence, 169; rebuilding the church, 175-181; rebuilding the home, 182-184; lecture tour, 183-184; resumption of church activities, 186; publication of "The Simple Truth," 188; sermon before National Conference,

189; third trip to Europe, 196; call to Church of the Messiah, N. Y., 198, 207; declines, 213; second call, and acceptance, 217, 218; reasons for accepting, 219-225; farewell sermon at Unity, 226; inaugural sermon in New York, 229; early success at the Messiah, 232-234; family affairs, 234-237; fourth voyage to Europe, 244-246; death of friends, 250; death of Annie, 252; fifth trip to Europe, 253; trip to California, 255; death of Mrs. Collyer, 259; tributes to, 259, 260; sixth voyage to Europe, 261-263; address before Berry St. Conference, 263; attends World's Parliament of Religions, 264; seventieth birthday celebration, 266; problem of retirement from burden of active work, 268-273; invites Dr. Savage to become his associate, 275; associate minister, 277-313; activities, 279; daily life, 280-283; sermon before A. U. A. in Boston, 284; visit to Flesher Bland in Canada, 284; seventh trip to Europe, 288-293; destruction of his N. Y. home by fire, 299-301; establishment of new home, 302; death of Harriett, 308; eightieth birthday celebration, 308; made Pastor Emeritus, 310; publication of

"Some Memories," 310; of "Father Taylor," 310; of "Where the Light Dwelleth," 311; becomes active minister of Messiah after Dr. Savage's retirement, 313; eighth voyage to England, 316; Litt. D. degree from Victoria University, Leeds, 319; eighty-fifth birthday celebration, 323; D.D. degree from Meadville Theological School, 324; relations with Mr. Holmes, 324-330; declining years, 330-332; last illness, 333-335; death, 335; funeral services, 336, 337; memorial services, 338, 339; memorials to, 340-341; secret of his life, 344-381; opinions on capital and labor, etc., 350; personality, 354-357; strength, 358-360; tenderness, 360-364; acute sensibilities, 364-369; simplicity, 369-373; his English style, 371; his religion, 372; as a preacher, 375; as a seer, 377; his mysticism, 378; final estimate, 380.

Letters to Miss Baker—I. 296, II. 4, 15, 19, 26, 69, 89, 93, 138, 170, 174, 223; Flesher Bland—I. 142, 196, 226, 231, 258, II. 2, 3, 11, 42, 54, 87, 88, 89, 92, 93, 141, 166, 171, 173, 175, 180, 182, 185, 188, 190, 191, 193, 194, 196, 226, 235, 237, 241, 242, 243, 245, 246, 251, 252,

INDEX

398

- 254, 255, 256, 257, 260, 261,
262, 263, 264, 265, 271, 273,
283, 286, 287, 292;
Mr. and Mrs. L. N. Bradley
—II. 303;
Mrs. Cohen—II. 275, 286, 287,
297, 298, 306, 330;
Norman Collyer—II. 264, 298,
305, 307;
Samuel Collyer—II. 233, 236,
237, 239, 293, 316, 324;
Mrs. Samuel Collyer—II. 294,
320;
Moncure D. Conway—I. 221;
Rev. V. D. Davis—II. 248;
Jasper Douthitt—II. 6, 7, 8,
11, 25, 38, 41, 81, 83, 86,
172, 189, 191, 195, 197, 246,
252, 277, 296, 297, 299, 323;
Mrs. H. P. Farnham—II. 290,
294;
Rabbi B. Felsenthal—II. 107;
Mrs. James T. Fields—II.
285, 287, 289, 290, 296, 299,
312, 315;
Rev. Thomas Greensboro—II.
192;
Edward Everett Hale—II.
18, 37, 60, 80, 103, 213;
Miss Eugenie Heller—II.
305;
Mrs. Emma Hosmer—II. 233,
234, 235, 254, 279, 283, 284,
289, 291;
Sir Edwin Lawrence—II. 169,
184, 187;
Lady Lawrence—II. 312, 321;
Mrs. T. E. Paget—II. 250;
Rev. Henry G. Spaulding—
II. 84;
Rev. Robert Spears—II. 142;
Mr. and Mrs. de B. Wilmot—
II. 288, 305, 311, 322;
Miss E. Vattel—II. 321.
Collyer, Mrs. Robert, R. C.'s
wife—*See* Ann Armitage.
Collyer, Robert Staples, R. C.'s
son—II. 15, 138, 150, 174, 226,
233, 235, 238, 240, 280, 295,
300, 311, 319; birth I. 113;
illness, II. 190, 191, 193, 223,
250; marriage, 303.
Collyer, Samuel, R. C.'s father
—I. 14, 29, 35, 36, 43, 46, 54,
56, 122, 173; birth, I. 6;
work-house boy, 7; marriage,
5; appearance and character,
8-13; death, 12, 78.
Collyer, Samuel, R. C.'s son—
I. 100, 249, II. 15, 138, 236,
239, 255, 293, 324; quoted on
R. C., I. 127, 200, 245, 246;
birth, I. 76; brought to U. S.,
113; marriage, II. 156; death
of wife, 194; second wife, 294,
320.
Collyer, Thomas, R. C.'s broth-
er—I. 31, II. 295.
Collyer family—origin and his-
tory—I. 2-5.
Conway, Moncure D.—I. 177,
178, 221, 308, II. 128, 165;
quoted on R. C., I. 166, 176,
II. 17.
Cooper, Peter—II. 203, 210, 250,
251.

Cornell University—I. 49, II. 231, 283, 360; and the Fewston Factory bell, I. 49-51; and the horse-shoe, II. 168; service in memory of R. C., 340.
Cromwell, Oliver—I. 16.

D

Darwin, Charles—I. 153, II. 355.
Davis, E. M.—I. 143, 161, 164, 168, 174, 181.
Defoe, Daniel—I. 39.
Delves, Jim—I. 82, 84, 146, 227.
Denton Moor—I. 55, II. 330, 361.
Dewey, Orville G.—II. 129, 200, 202, 203.
Dexter, Wirt—I. 236, 239.
Dickens, Charles—I. 72, II. 4.
Dobson, Edward—I. 66.
Dobson, John—I. 69, 70, 71, 86, 199, II. 2, 3, 46, 56, 60, 87, 89.
Donelson, Fort—R. C. at, I. 262-270, 277, 287, II. 41.
Douthit, Jasper—II. 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 38, 41, 82, 83, 86, 172, 189, 191, 195, 197, 246, 252, 277, 296, 297, 299, 315, 323.
Druids, in Yorkshire—I. 15.

E

Eastman, Mrs. Joseph—*See* Harriett Collyer.

Eliot, Dr. Charles W., quoted—II. 347.
Eliot, Rev. Samuel A.—II. 267.
Eliot, Dr. William G.—I. 218, 257, II. 165.
Elizabeth, Queen—I. 24, 51, II. 92.
Elliott, Ebenezer—I. 176.
Emerson, Ralph Waldo—I. 151, 152, 163, 165, II. 138, 165, 374; quoted, I. 116, 245.
Encyclopedia Britannica—I. 124, II. 3.
Engle, Albert—I. 118, 120.
Europe—R. C.'s first visit to, II. 49-70; second voyage to, 143, 146; third voyage to, 196; fourth voyage, 244-246; fifth voyage, 253; sixth voyage, 261; seventh voyage, 288; last voyage, 316.
Evolution—I. 153, 154, II, 348.

F

Factory Acts, the—I. 46, 52.
Fairbairn, Peter—I, 78.
Fairfax, old Yorkshire family—I. 17.
Fairfax, Black Tom—I. 17.
Fairfax, Edward—I. 18, 50.
Farley, Rev. Frederick—II. 208, 229.
Farnham, Mrs. H. P.—II. 282, 290, 294.
"Father Taylor," R. C.'s book—II. 310.
Felsenthal, Rabbi B.—II. 107,

- Fewston—I. 4, 33, 50, 51, II. 52, 57, 86, 250, 355.
 Fewston parish church—I. 5, 13, 14, 48, 82, 145.
 Fields, Mrs. J. T.—I. 108, II. 165, 267, 282, 285, 287, 289, 290, 296, 299, 312, 315.
 First Unitarian Church in Chicago—I. 196, 200, 202, 205, 207, 209, 210, 211, 213, 215, 217, 218, II. 73, 78; calls R. C. to its service, I. 183; history of, 190-192; relinquishes R. C. to Unity Church, 224.
 Follen, Dr. Charles—I. 191.
 Foster, John—I. 69.
 Franklin, Benjamin—I. 75.
 Fremont, John C.—I. 175, 256.
 Furness, Dr. William Henry—I. 71, 143, 156, 168, 174, 176, 177, 181, 183, 186, 205, 239, II. 42, 267, 282; career, I. 165; character and public standing, 165, 166; interest in Abolition, 165; influence on R. C., 167-171; invites R. C. to preach in his pulpit, 177; secures appointment for R. C. in Chicago, 183, 184; preaches sermon at dedication of rebuilt Unity, II. 182.
- G
- Gaskell, Mrs.—I. 198, II. 60.
 George III, King—I. 30.
 Gill, Robinson—I. 33; II. 262, 291, 293.
 Goldsmith, Oliver—I. 29, 39, 127.
 Grant, Gen. U. S.—I. 261.
 Greeley, Horace—I. 299.
 Greeley, Samuel S.—I. 208, 209, 216, 218.
 Guthrie, Thomas—I. 83.
- H
- Hale, Dr. E. E.—I. 306; II. 18, 32, 37, 80, 83, 103, 138, 208, 210, 213, 229, 284, 295, 374.
 Hale, Senator John—I. 176.
 Hall, Dr. Frank Oliver—II. 337; quoted, 136, 353, 369.
 Hammond's hammer factory—I. 109, 118.
 Hardisty, John—I. 35, 67.
 Hardisty, William—I. 67.
 Hardy, Will, R. C.'s teacher—I. 33, 34, 37; II. 46.
 Harvard University—I. 165.
 Harvey, Rev. L. A.—II. 337.
 Hatboro, library at—I. 124, 133.
 Haworth, town in Yorkshire—I. 19, 45, 66; II. 52, 59.
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel—I. 125; II. 165.
 Heller, Eugenie—II. 305.
 Heller, George—I. 121.
 Hepworth, Rev. George H.—II. 205.
 Hering, Henry—II. 341.
 Higginson, T. W.—I. 165; II. 5.
 Hobson, John—I. 68.
 Holmes, Rev. John Haynes—II.

316; relations with R. C., 325-331.
 Horsman, Dame, R. C.'s teacher—I. 33.
 Horton, Rev. E. A.—quoted, II. 140.
 Hosmer, Dr. George W.—I. 214, 218, 220; II. 110.
 Hosmer, Mrs.—*See* Emma Collyer.
 Howe, Julia Ward—II. 289.
 Hudson, Christopher—I. 66.

I

Ilkley—I. 4, 16, 53, 54, 55, 57, 66, 67, 69, 74, 75, 78, 101, 185, 206, 227, 241; II. 2, 46, 48, 86, 250, 293, 318, 319, 341, 355; description of, in 1837, I. 58, 59; R. C. preaches at, 90; revisited, II. 52-57, 143, 196, 246, 253, 262, 288, 316.
 "Ilkley: Ancient and Modern"—R. C.'s book—I. 59; II. 47.
 Ilkley parish church—I. 64, 82, 145; R. C. preaches in, 64, 65.
 "Iron Gates," made by R. C.—I. 74.

J

James, King—I. 24.
 "Jane Eyre"—I. 137.
 Jeremiah—I. 25.
 Job—I. 25; II. 70.
 "John Watkinson's Wife," R. C.'s novel—II. 188.
 Johnson, Dr. Samuel—I. 19, 227.

K

Keighley, R. C.'s birthplace—I. 5, 14, 29; II. 335.
 King, Thomas Starr—I. 205, 209; II. 38.
 Knopf, Dr. S. A.—II. 338.

L

Labour, condition of in England in early 19th century—I. 3, 4, 46-48.
 Labour legislation—I. 52.
 Lamb, Charles—I. 72; II. 349.
 Lawrence, Sir Edwin—II. 169, 172, 184, 187, 290.
 Lawrence, Sir James—II. 144, 165.
 Lecturing, by R. C.—II. 81-84, 183-185.
 Leeds, city of,—I. 29, 51, 57, 78, 100, 101, 122; II. 47, 52, 55, 60, 87, 143, 145, 197, 263.
 Liberal Christian League—II. 74-78.
 Lincoln, Abraham—I. 243, 244, 245, 250, 290, 300; II. 19, 363; R. C.'s glimpse of, 256; R. C.'s attacks on, 290-293, 299, 305; R. C.'s praise of, 294, 301; R. C.'s estimate of, 304-309; assassination of, 308.
 Liverpool—I. 100, 104; II. 52, 143.
 Locke, John—I. 148.
 Longfellow, H. W.—II. 192, 374.

Longfellows, in Yorkshire—I.
16, 17.

Lunt, Rev. William—II. 201.

M

Macauley, T. B.—I. 71, 72.

MacCauley, Rev. Clay—quoted,
139.

Martineau, Harriett—I. 91.

Martineau, James—I. 233; II.
129, 144, 145, 244, 345.

May, Rev. Samuel J.—I. 165;
II. 21, 80.

Mayo, Dr. A. D.—I. 220.

Meadville Theological School—
II. 10, 42, 43; confers D.D.
on R. C., 324; R. C. endow-
ments, 324, 341.

Metcalfe, Robert—I. 66.

Methodism—I. 83, 98, 146, 164,
171, 180, 198, 211, 230; II. 35;
R. C.'s conversion to, 81, 82,
97, 144; R. C. expelled from,
180.

Methodists—I. 81, 85, 89, 92,
129, 147, 149, 150, 152, 173.

Moody, Dwight L.—I. 271-273;
II. 181, 359.

Mott, Lucretia—I. 143, 155,
161, 162, 164, 173, 174, 181,
186; II. 10, 374; birth, I. 156;
career, 156, 157; character
and ability, 158-160; influence
on R. C., 162-164, 174-181;
death, II. 250.

Mott, James—I. 156, 157, 161,
164, 173, 181, 186.

Music Hall, Boston—*See* Twen-

ty-eighth Congregational So-
ciety.

N

Napoleon I—I. 3; II. 355.

Nash, J. B.—II. 338.

National Conference of Unitar-
ians—II. 80; R. C.'s sermon
at, 189.

"Nature and Life," R. C.'s
book—I. 263; II. 87, 88, 89,
100.

Nelson, Lord—I. 7.

New York—I. 107, 116, 183; II.
42, 45, 235, 345; R. C. lands
at, I. 104; advent of R. C.
in, as minister of Church of
the Messiah, II. 230; R. C.'s
homes in, 232, 302.

Non-Resistance—R. C. on, I.
301, 302.

Norman, Thomas, R. C.'s grand-
father—I. 8.

Noyes, Rev. George A., minis-
ter of First Church of Chi-
cago—I. 202, 203, 206, 210;
invites R. C. to preach, 203;
resigns, 204.

O

Osgood, Dr. Samuel—II. 203.

Otley—II. 55, 262.

Owen, Robert—I. 46.

P

Panic of 1857—I. 119, 121, 123.

Parker, Theodore—I. 38, 151,

152, 163, 165, 190; II. 20, 21, 25, 28, 29, 33, 36, 124, 247, 345, 352, 359.
 Pateley, town in Yorkshire—I. 27; II. 262.
 Paulinus, Christian missionary to England—I. 15.
 Pennsylvania—I. 96, 114, 132, 135, 141, 142, 173, 203, 297; II. 44.
 Percys, old English family—I. 16.
 Philadelphia—I. 108, 109, 114, 125, 129, 130, 142, 161, 164, 176, 183, 205; II. 10, 42.
 "Pilgrim's Progress," Bunyan's—I. 39; II. 122.
 Pittsburg Landing, R. C. at—I. 270-273, 277.
 Powers, Rev. Henry—II. 205.
 Priestley, Joseph—I. 151.
 Puritans—I. 16.

R

Ramshaw, Rev., vicar of Fewston parish—I. 14, 35, 36.
 Republican Party—I. 175.
 Roberts, Mr. J. E.—II. 300, 301, 302.
 Roberts, Mrs. J. E.—II. 280, 300, 302, 303, 317.
 "Robinson Crusoe," Defoe's—I. 39, 67.
 Rogers, H. H.—II. 282, 302.
 Romans, in Yorkshire—I. 15, 24.
 Rubens—I. 30.

S

Sanitary Commission—I. 250-254, 275, 276; II. 42, 48.
 Savage, Gertrude—II. 303, 311, 319, 371.
 Savage, Minot J.—II. 128, 247, 266, 273, 295, 296, 308, 314, 336, 349; called to Church of the Messiah, 274, 275; associate with R. C., 278; resigns, 313.
 Savonarola—I. 190.
 Saxons, in Yorkshire—I. 15, 24.
 Scaife House—I. 33.
 Schermerhorn, Rev. M. K.—II. 215, 216.
 Scott, Sir Walter—I. 71, 72.
 Sears, Edmund Hamilton—I. 205.
 Second Unitarian Society in Brooklyn—calls R. C. to its pulpit—II. 37, 42.
 Servetus—II. 116.
 Shaftsbury, Lord—I. 46.
 Shakespeare, William—I. 25, 39, 72, 127; II. 255, 355.
 Shippen, Rev. R. R.—II. 208, 209, 210, 211.
 Shoemakertown, R. C.'s home in Pennsylvania—I. 109, 110, 112, 114, 116, 121, 124, 127, 129, 134, 152, 171, 175, 182, 205, 241; II. 45.
 "Sketch Book," Irving's—I. 71.
 Slavery—I. 161, 166; R. C. on, 297-301.
 Slicer, Rev. T. R.—II. 308.
 Smith, Mary Ann—I. 66.

Smith, Sydney—I. 3.
 Smith, Thomas—I. 66, 84.
 "Some Memories," R. C.'s autobiography—I. 55, 117, 121, 153, 171, 180, 208, 240, 256, 263; II. 98, 106, 150, 310.
 Spaulding, Rev. Henry G.—II. 84.
 Spears, Rev. Robert—II. 60, 142, 144, 169.
 Speight, Sampson—I. 75.
 Spencer, Herbert—I. 153, 154, 345, 349.
 Spurgeon, Dr.—II. 132, 345.
 Staples, Rev. N. A.—I. 221; II. 34, 38, 87; death, 42.
 Stephenson, Edward—I. 66.
 Stephenson, Thomas—I. 66.
 Stokes, Thomas—I. 129, 130.
 Stowe, Harriett Beecher—I. 128, 198.
 Strathmore Fire—II. 299.
 Switzerland, visited—II. 60-68, 145.

T

Taylor, Isaac—I. 69.
 Tennyson, Lord—II. 140.
 Thackeray, W. M.—I. 72.
 "The Life That Now Is," R. C.'s book—II. 87.
 "The Simple Truth," R. C.'s book—II. 188.
 "Things New and Old," R. C.'s book—II. 263, 264.
 Thompson, James W.—I. 205.
 "Thoughts for Daily Living," R. C.'s book—II. 310.
 Townton Field, battle of—I. 16.

Transcendentalism—I. 151.
 Tuckerman, Dr. Joseph—I. 193, 194.
 Turner, Horsfall—II. 47.
 Twenty-eighth Congregational Society in Boston—II. 37; calls R. C. to succeed Theodore Parker, 21, 25; resolution on R. C., 30; gives R. C. second call, 31.

U

"Uncle Tom's Cabin"—I. 128.
 "Under the Snow," R. C.'s ballad—I. 42.
 Unitarian Ministry at Large—I. 184, 186; history of, 192-195; work of, in Chicago, 195, 196.
 Unitarianism—I. 140, 151, 165, 209, 211; II. 11, 12, 13, 14, 35, 114; R. C.'s conversion to, I. 140-172; R. C.'s relation to, II, 79.
 Unitarians—II. 50, 79, 138, 172, 177.
 Unity Church in Chicago—I. 236; II. 25, 27, 34, 35, 37, 40, 69, 71, 74, 81, 82, 95, 146, 212, 222; organized, I. 208, 209; begins holding services, 210, 212; invites R. C. to take charge of pulpit, 210; erects first building, 213, 214; calls R. C. to be minister, 216-218; history from 1859-1861, 221-224; people of, 235; in Civil War, 246, 247, 261, 276,

- 278, 279, 294-297; II. 16;
 prosperity of, 18, 19; sends
 R. C. to Europe in 1865, 44;
 parish activities, 72-78; build-
 ing of the new church, 94-
 116; laying of corner-stone,
 100; dedication, 106-110;
 great free-will offering, 113,
 114; description of building,
 114-116; abounding prosper-
 ity, 116-118; building de-
 stroyed in the great fire, 151;
 ruins, 154; service on the
 ruins, 157-163; losses suffer-
 ed, 176; rebuilding, 177-181;
 rededication, 181; returned
 prosperity, 186, 187; R. C.
 resigns pastorate of, 198;
 farewell sermon, 226; recep-
 tion to R. C., 227; revisittings
 by R. C., 231, 240, 261; serv-
 ice in memory of R. C., 338.
 Universalism—I. 151, 233.
 "Unto thy temple, Lord, we
 come," R. C.'s hymn—II. 110,
 146.
- V
- Valery-Radot, René, his "Life
 of Pasteur," quoted—I. 2.
 Vatet, Miss E.—II. 321.
 "Vicar of Wakefield," the—I.
 71.
- W
- War, R. C.'s attitude toward—
 I. 301-304.
 Washburn, river in Yorkshire—
 I. 4, 27, 51, 115.
- Washburndale—I. 29, 55, 56,
 101; II. 46.
 Washington, George—I. 17; R.
 C.'s lecture on, II. 183.
 Washington, City of—I. 254;
 II. 339.
 Wasson, Rev. David A.—II. 36.
 Watson, Harriett, R. C.'s first
 wife—I. 75, 97; death, I. 79,
 80.
 Waverly Novels—I. 71.
 Weiss, Rev. John—II. 21.
 Wells, William, R. C.'s half
 brother—I. 31; death, 77.
 Wendte, Rev. C. W.—II. 164.
 Wesley, John—I. 85; II. 345.
 Western Unitarian Conference
 —I. 219, 220; II. 6, 42, 79,
 93.
 Westhouse, R. C.'s early home
 —See Blubberhouses.
 Wharfedale—I. 57, 115; II. 52,
 55, 58, 238.
 "When Enoch Walked With
 God," R. C.'s sermon—I. 238;
 II. 136.
 "Where the Light Dwelleth,"
 R. C.'s book—II. 310.
 Whitley, Ben—I. 68.
 Whittington, Dick, and his Cat
 —I. 39, 67.
 Wilmot, Mrs. de B.—II. 288,
 305, 311, 322.
 Wordsworth, William—I. 69;
 quoted, 20.
 Wright, Rev. Merle St. C.—II.
 267, 337; quoted, 331.
 Wylie, Dr. Robert H.—II.
 333.

INDEX

401

Y

- Yorkshire—I. 3, 36, 50, 89, 114,
127, 132, 135, 141, 204; II. 44,
335; history of, I. 15-18; nat-
ural features of, 18-24; people
of, 24-26; revisited, II. 54-60,
196, 245, 253, 262, 288, 316.

1. The first part of the text is a list of names and titles.

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